

Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe
November 24, 2024
Year of the Most Holy Eucharist
Reflection #48

*“The priest administering Communion cannot know the state of a soul of the person seeking to receive it. Is there any justification, then, for his ever denying Communion to any Catholic?”
Peter Kreeft, Practical Theology, p.264)*

Over the course of this year, we have reflected upon the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eucharist. It has been my hope that you have found these reflections an assistance to your own understanding and greater belief in this Truth of our Faith. As this is our last reflection, I would like to address the initial question which instigated this Year of the Eucharist. The question centered upon Catholics receiving Communion who supported or promoted ideas and policies which are contrary to our Catholic Faith.

Allow me to first begin by addressing the “elephant in the room.” This question, and many similar, seemed to arise from the confusion surrounding Catholic politicians and the response of our American Bishops. Bishops offered varied statements and responses which seemed to contradict statements and responses offered by their fellow Bishops. Adding to the confusion, a study was published which highlighted the growing Catholic population which no longer believed the Eucharist to be the Real Presence of Jesus. If the Eucharist is only a symbol, then what concern is it who receives it? But, if the Eucharist is truly the Body and Blood of Jesus, then how should we address these questions and concerns? Furthermore, let us also address the second “elephant in the room.” This topic is NOT intended to single out one particular person or political party. I do not believe it beneficial for our spiritual growth to point fingers at others concerning sensitive topics. Always, always, spiritual growth must begin with a humble examination of ourselves to make sure we are not blinded by the plank in our eye while commenting upon another’s speck.

With these two issues behind us, we need to understand these questions as they pertain to our understanding of those who commit sin. Concerning Catholics, we understand that sin can be divided into two categories. There are those individuals whose sins are known publicly and those others whose sins are not open and public. The lives of politicians or any famous people have become more open due to our access via social media. It is not uncommon for a Hollywood celebrity to post their opinions and actions numerous times a day on an array of subjects, places or individuals. Celebrity endorsements are a common fixture in our culture. For the sake of this reflection, let us suppose there is a famous Catholic who openly practices or advocates for others to embrace a particular thing which is opposed by the Catholic Faith. Should that person be denied communion? It is true, as stated in the quote above, a priest, barring divine intervention, does not possess the ability to “read souls,” knowing what the intentions are of this individual or why they support this thing. However, it may be understood as giving scandal to others if they were to receive Communion. The scandal may be seen as the Catholic Church approving of an action or behavior it had formerly opposed. In essence, it could be seen as Jesus Christ approves of the position through the reception of His Body and Blood. Secondly, a further thought which might be considered is the spiritual welfare of the Catholic

whose sin is public. In the past, the Church would publicly make a pronouncement of “excommunication” towards an individual such as this. The excommunication would be made public only after the person had been given the opportunity to dialogue with a representative of the Church. This discussion was intended to listen to the person and compassionately explain the Church’s teaching while hoping the individual would come to understand and accept this teaching. In doing so, they would seek forgiveness for their prior position and return to full communion with the Faith. The decision to deny Communion to a Catholic whose sin is known publicly is a grave situation and must be carried out by a proper authority only after numerous attempts have been made to reconcile with the Catholic party. These are “last resort” measures and cannot, nor should not, be implemented haphazardly. I am thankful that you and I will not be placed in a situation where we must be the one to make this most serious decision.

Turning our attention to those whose sins are not open and public, the denial of the Eucharist should be something they choose for themselves. When we commit grave sin, mortal sin, we know that we SHOULD NOT receive Holy Communion. This has been stressed from the time of and teachings of Saint Paul. The notion of causing scandal may not be a factor in their mind, but it is a reality in their relationship with God. This is where most of us will find ourselves. For this reason, the Sacrament of Reconciliation should be front and foremost in all of our lives. An old gardening saying from years past is a good reminder for us: “It is easier to remove a weed from your garden when it is still small. Once it has grown to maturity, pulling it out becomes much more difficult and can wound the other areas of our garden where its roots have made a home.”

I feel it necessary to conclude this reflection posing a thought for your consideration. The real issue is not the denial of Communion to public figures, but one of belief in the Real Presence. If we truly believe Jesus is present in the Eucharist, then we will not want to do anything to offend Him who has been so good to us. This applies to all of us, not only a certain select group. My family, I do not know the state of your souls nor do you know the state of mine. Therefore, I firmly believe it is of the utmost importance that we pray for each other and for all people to be reconciled with God. We should not want any soul to be lost from God for eternity. Rather, let us pray for all, encourage all to live their faith and assist those who desire to know God in a more meaningful way. We have used this year to strengthen our own personal beliefs concerning the Eucharist, let us not have spent these months in vain. Idleness in the Christian is fodder for the forges of the Devil’s workshop.