

## **The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ**

### **June 19, 2022**

When Communists took control of China, one of their first missions was to put an end to all religious practice. They did that ruthlessly by burning down churches and killing clergy throughout the country.

In one village, Communist soldiers marched into the local Catholic Church and confined the priest to house arrest in his rectory. Then they proceeded to vandalize the parish church, breaking all the statues, and tearing out the pews. In one final act of desecration, they took the tabernacle and threw it outside the church. When they did so, it broke open and many of the communion hosts were scattered on the ground. From his window in the rectory, the priest looked on with horror to see the Eucharist covered with dirt. At the same time, he felt helpless to do anything except stay by the window to adore our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

Later that night, as he looked out from his window, he saw a shadow moving behind the church. At first, he couldn't make out what it was. Then, he recognized it to be a young girl from his parish. She walked up to one of the hosts that were on the ground, knelt down in front of it, bent over, and picked it up from the ground with her tongue. Back then, we were only able to receive the Eucharist on the tongue. And so, even though it meant getting some dirt in her mouth, she was willing to do it out of love and reverence for Jesus.

For the next few nights, the young girl returned and did the same thing, receiving Jesus on her tongue, and then sneaking away.

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On one night, however, the guards caught sight of her. They ran over and asked what she was doing. When they saw that she had received one of the hosts, they beat her to death with the butts of their rifles.

That young girl gave her life because of her love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. And she is not alone. Throughout the centuries, Catholics have guarded the Eucharist even at the cost of their lives.

Why would anyone risk their life for the Eucharist? Would anyone do that if Holy Communion was merely a symbol of the Body and Blood of Christ? Probably not. No one would be willing to die for a symbol. What has given millions of Catholics the courage and the perseverance to receive the Eucharist and protect it at all costs has been the belief that it is truly the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

Why do we believe that the Blessed Sacrament is truly the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ? Because He told us so. At the Last Supper, He said, "Take this all of you and eat it. This is my Body." And when He handed them the cup, He said, "This is my Blood which will be poured out for you." In today's gospel, we hear the story of the multiplication of the loaves. After this, in the Gospel of John, He tells the crowds, "This bread is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world." (Jn 6:51). From the very beginning, the followers of Jesus have always taken Jesus at His word and believed that, when they received the Eucharist, they received the very Body of Blood of Jesus Christ. St Paul tells us as much in today's second reading. And we continue to believe and teach that to this day.

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So, whenever we come to Mass, we should be very mindful of what it is we are doing and who it is that we are receiving. It is natural for us to get distracted from time to time during Mass. But, whenever we catch our thoughts drifting on us, we should call our attention back to what we are celebrating. We do not gather here as spectators but as active participants. All during Mass, we should be trying to pay close attention, lifting our minds and hearts to God, and being aware of what is going on around us. This is especially true when we get in line to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus.

There is a tradition that, when the priest says "For this is my Body, which will be given up for you", we respond silently, "My Lord and my God". We do the same thing when he holds up the chalice and says, "Do this in memory of me." Making this act of faith before the Body and Blood of Christ helps us to grow in our love for Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament. It also strengthens our belief.

The times before and after we receive Holy Communion should also be times of intense prayer. As we process up to receive Jesus, we should be mindful of this greatest of all gifts that God has left us. There are no more important moments in our lives than those times that we welcome Jesus into our bodies, hearts, and souls in Holy Communion. We should be receiving Him with great love and reverence. And when we return to our seats, we should also be focused on what is happening within us. God Himself is present. We should hold Him close to our heart and cherish this precious time with our Lord.

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When we receive Holy Communion, the Eucharistic Minister says: "The Body of Christ" and we say "Amen!" We are saying "I believe" as a profession of faith concerning the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

Out of love and reverence for this great gift, we should also be aware of what condition our souls are in. No one is worthy to receive Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. But there are times when we should not present ourselves for Holy Communion. If it has been more than a year since we have gone to confession, it would be better to not receive communion and, instead, make a point of going to confession before we receive again. If we are not married in the Church or if we are living with someone we are not married to, we should not receive communion until we have made the situation right. It is not always as difficult to do as people sometimes make it out to be. All we need to do is meet with a deacon or priest and take the time necessary to work through whatever stands in the way of being married in the Church. Not only will it relieve your conscience, it will also make your marriage stronger. And you will then be able to receive all the graces that Jesus wants for you in Holy Communion.

Sometimes people get offended to hear that they should not receive communion. That is understandable because no one wants to be excluded or to think that they are being judged. But the truth is that receiving communion when we are not ready for it not only offends Jesus but hurts us. The Blessed Sacrament is medicine for our souls. But all medicines have contraindications. For instance, there are some medicines we shouldn't take if we have high blood pressure or other problems. Taking medicines under those circumstances would only make our situation worse. The same is true for Holy Communion. When we receive Jesus with serious sins in our

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conscience, it can harden our hearts and make us more prideful. Instead of drawing us closer to Jesus, it can put more distance between Him and us. By going to confession and doing whatever it takes to make our hearts ready, the medicine of the Eucharist can heal and strengthen us.

In the Eucharist, Jesus gives us His very self. He holds nothing back. Therefore, He deserves no less from us. We should receive Him with all the love of our hearts.