

**4. March 2020**

**"The Coronavirus and the reception of the Holy Communion" (Part I)**

Answering questions  
Part 4

In these days when the proliferation of the so-called "coronavirus" is disturbing many people, I have been asked very topical questions, which I would like to address. It is a question of receiving Holy Communion... In some places, on the recommendation of the bishops in charge, Communion is being distributed in the hand at Holy Masses. This is what I have heard from Germany, from Mexico, from Jerusalem and, even more, from Italy. Recently the same measure was taken in Ecuador as well.

I have been asked what my point of view is and what my recommendation would be in the present situation. My answer is particularly addressed to those Catholics who used to receive communion on the mouth and who are now confused by the new instructions being given.

At this point, I would like to thank you for the trust you place in me by asking me such questions. In tomorrow's meditation I will also continue with this theme, and offer some options on how to concretely face the given situation. To those who were already waiting in this meditation for concrete advice, I ask for one more day of patience, because before applying it, it is advisable to make some preliminary considerations.

In the first place, I have the impression that, even looking at it from a health perspective, it is a bit exaggerated that communion is given only in the hand because of the coronavirus. In Italy, churches have even been closed and Eucharistic celebrations cancelled. It is not understood why communion on the tongue should be more harmful to the proliferation of the virus than communion on the hand. With the hands one is much more in contact with the environment than with the mouth. In any case, it would be prudent for the bishops to express at most a recommendation - as they did in the United States - and that neither priests nor the faithful be forced to distribute or receive communion in the hand, contrary to their convictions. I do not know in what terms communications have been made in other countries?

The reception of communion is a spiritual event. In that sense, it is totally different from an ordinary meal. For this reason, the Church should not immediately assume the concern of civil bodies or adopt their preventive measures in their worship. Holy Mass is a sacred event, and communion on the mouth is a sacred practice. To give a recommendation to stop this practice and to implement another one, even if only temporarily, there would have to be a very serious reason, which, in my opinion, is not sufficiently given with the coronavirus.

This is because the situation becomes very difficult for those faithful who are accustomed to receive Holy Communion on the tongue, as it is the case in many countries, for example, in Latin America. Now, they are easily forced to adopt a form of receiving communion that is foreign to them and displeases them. This can lead them to an inner conflict, and for some it can even become a matter of conscience.

In countries where communion in the hand is frequent, there are faithful who, out of conviction, receive it exclusively on the tongue, because they do not want to touch the Body of Christ with their unconsecrated hands. These are very strong motives, and the faithful who have such convictions can rely on numerous statements by saints and popes.

Pope John Paul II, on his visit to Germany in 1980, said: *"But I say that I cannot be for it (Hand Communion), and also cannot recommend it." The Priest has, "as servant of the Holy Eucharist and all Holy forms, a primary responsibility — primary, because it is complete. To touch the sacred species and to distribute them with their own hands is a privilege of the ordained."* (Dominicae Cenaе, n. 11) St. Francis of Assisi stated: *"Only they (the priests) should administer it, and not others."*

St. Thomas Aquinas left us the following writing: *"To reverence this Holy Sacrament (the Holy Eucharist), nothing should touch it, except what is consecrated; just as the Host and the Chalice are consecrated, so are the consecrated hands of the priests, to touch this Sacrament"* (Summa Theologica, Part III; Q.82, art. 3, Rep Obj 8).

It is therefore difficult for the faithful to be confronted with a recommendation or instruction which affects the interior of the soul, and which can even touch the intimacy of the love relationship with Jesus. It can also be a burden for priests to have to recommend something that might be against their convictions. According to the regulations of the Church, the faithful can decide for themselves how to

receive Holy Communion: and this freedom of decision must be preserved!

In my view, communion on the tongue, as it was practiced until recently throughout the Church and continues to be practiced in many countries, is perfectly appropriate for the sanctity of the event. In the person of the priest, the Lord offers us his Body, which we must receive in a gesture of deep reverence and, if possible, on our knees. In his Catechism, Pope St. Pius X tells us: *"In the act of receiving Holy Communion we should be kneeling, hold our head slightly raised, our eyes modest and fixed on the sacred Host, our mouth sufficiently open, and the tongue slightly out over the lips."* (Catechism of Pius X, n. 643)

This does not mean that every person who otherwise receives communion lacks reverence. But communion on the mouth and on the knees, without touching the Body of Christ with one's hands, is probably the most reverent attitude in terms of visible gesture.

For several decades now, the Church has permitted communion in the hand for various reasons, and more and more Catholics are choosing to do so. For the reasons already mentioned, I consider communion in the mouth to be more appropriate, and I am well aware that an abuse can occur much more easily by taking communion in the hand. In fact, this happens, and unfortunately even sacrilegious. I myself receive communion only on the mouth, and this is what I have always recommended to the faithful. However, I do not go so far as to say that communion in the hand is a sin and that a sacrilege would be committed. This counts all the more in the present situation, when the measures, although in my view unnecessary and even inappropriate, are being taken by the hierarchy and not by the faithful.

That is why, despite all the pain this situation causes, it would be important - if possible - to find a way that does not affect our inner peace, which is so important precisely in the Holy Eucharist, the supreme act of the Church.