

5. March 2020

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

Answering questions Part 5

I would like to make a supplement or correction to the text from yesterday. It has been brought to my attention from the medical side that the bishops probably fear an increased risk during oral communion because the pathogens of the coronavirus are mainly found in the throat. When the mouth is open, they may be transmitted to other people. But, despite this, I still say that, in my view, the measures are not appropriate!

Today I will try to give some advice on how one could act if at the Holy Masses in the parish one belongs to or attends, the communion is distributed in the hand, and one considers such a practice as alien or unworthy of oneself.

A first option would be to find out if in other churches one can still receive communion as is customary. One should also find out whether this is really an order or whether it is just a recommendation by the bishops, which priests can adapt in different ways. If another parish were found where one could receive communion as usual, a temporary solution would have been found. In fact, there is a notable difference between a "recommendation" and an "order". Recommendations do not have the character of obedience; whereas orders normally do require obedience.

It could be suggested to the celebrant that all those who wish to receive communion on the mouth do so at the end, so as not to disturb those who might fear contagion. Another alternative that could be proposed would be that to all those who wish to receive communion on the mouth, it be administered separately, possibly in a side chapel, if there is one...

Another option to which recourse could be had, in the event that communion is being distributed exclusively in the hand, would be to abstain from receiving holy communion, and to offer the Lord that sacrifice precisely in Lent, for so many unworthy or neglected communions. In Germany, I heard from a priest that the Fraternity of St Peter located in Germany, which celebrates the Holy Tridentine Mass, is not currently distributing communion, in view of the situation (at least this is the case in Germany). In this sense, we can also consider that, by consciously

renouncing, we could discover even more the value of frequent or even daily communion. It would be similar to bodily fasting, through which we learn to appreciate food more, which we normally consume quite naturally.

Now, we shall have to see how long this regulation remains in place.

If the way of receiving communion becomes a matter of conscience for one; if one has the impression of offending the Lord by receiving it in the hand, then the option would be to abstain. In any case, what should be avoided is to force the priest to give communion on the mouth, since he is only obeying the bishop's recommendation by giving it in the hand. Such an act would put him in a difficult situation, besides drawing attention to himself and disturbing the liturgy, creating confusion among the faithful.

It would be good to make sure beforehand if the Priest suddenly admits exceptions for those who, for various reasons, do not want to receive Communion in the hand. Priests can be asked to have mercy on the interior anguish of the faithful. It is not enough simply to have recourse to the argument of obedience, when - as I have already mentioned - for some it may be a matter of conscience.

In this context, it would be good to offer our Lord the pain that this situation causes to ourselves or to others; and, if this is how one perceives it interiorly, also the pain that it causes him. Recently I spoke to a parish priest who has been obliged for some time now to distribute communion also in the hands of the faithful, and he said that even today it is still a suffering to have to do so.

Although we should not share the opinion that certain bishops would be taking advantage of the situation of the coronavirus to implement communion in the hand in an obligatory way, it is necessary to be vigilant. The faithful should not be deprived of the freedom to receive communion in the mouth, as they used to do.

Perhaps some people could also join in writing to ask the priests and the bishop to withdraw such a recommendation, since it puts the faithful in conflict.

Before finishing, I would like to mention again the fact that one can consciously renounce to receive Holy Communion, in case of serious interior difficulties.

In my opinion, it would be advisable first to be clear before God about which path to choose in the future, rather than feeling bad about receiving communion, having a guilty conscience, feeling that one is betraying the Lord... First we must recover peace in our soul, and then let the Lord calmly show us what is right in the present

situation. In such a case, I think that the Lord will grant His grace also through spiritual communion, and that, therefore, one would not be missing anything.

To sum up my position:

It seems to me that the measure of recommending or decreeing communion in the hand because of the coronavirus is not appropriate. It represents too great an intrusion into the inner sphere of the faithful, which can lead to conflict. It is not enough simply to ask for obedience in this matter, since it could indeed be a matter of conscience for the person. And when conscience comes into play, the situation cannot be handled in the same way as if it were a matter of the will. What the Church can do is ask for trust in a measure taken.

In my opinion, communion in the hand is not a sin or sacrilege, but I do consider it a questionable form of communion, for many reasons. Just as John Paul II said in 1980 in Germany, I cannot recommend communion in the hand. If it is implemented as a norm during the coronavirus crisis, the qualms and conflict that this could represent for not a few of the faithful are not being taken into account. Therefore, there should be options for them to receive communion, without being forced to take it in hand, against their convictions.

The recommendation of the bishops could be seen as an emergency and temporary regulation, which would justify communion in hand for the period of crisis. Anyone who sees it that way can certainly practice communion in the hand without incurring guilt. But whoever perceives from within that this is not the right thing for him, it is better to abstain from receiving communion or to look for ways to do so that do not dull his conscience, but to avoid any confrontation when receiving communion!

At this point, I can say no more. This is a very sensitive and also important subject, which I will return to if necessary. And again: thank you for the trust!