

Is Spiritual Communion for Everyone?

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PERHAPS ALL BUT FORGOTTEN by many Catholics (and unheard of by most) until Cardinal Walter Kasper's recent reference to it, the notion of a spiritual communion has made headlines in the Catholic press of late. The Cardinal addressed an extraordinary consistory of cardinals on marriage and the family on February 20, 2014, in anticipation of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which will take up the theme of "pastoral challenges for the family in the context of evangelization."¹ Among other things during the last part of his talk, the Cardinal wondered about the possibility of those who are divorced and remarried being reunited with the Church and permitted to take Holy Communion. Referring to the 1994 Letter to Bishops from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith concerning the reception of Holy Communion by the divorced and remarried, Cardinal Kasper reflected on the option for the divorced and remarried to participate in a spiritual communion on account of their inability to receive sacramentally. The Cardinal admits that spiritual communion does not apply for all divorced people, but only those who are well disposed. But, he asks, if a person who receives spiritual communion is one with Jesus Christ, how can he or she be in conflict with the commandment of Christ? Why, then, cannot the same person receive

¹ The announcement of the Cardinal's address is found at the website of the Vatican Information Service, Holy See Press Office, February 20, 2014.

sacramental communion? The Cardinal alludes to the answer when he subsequently wonders about the possibility of the divorced and remarried returning to the sacrament of penance and communion.² However, it is the question of the meaning of a spiritual communion that is at stake, first and foremost. In light of Pope Francis' statement during his interview with *Corriere della Sera*, regarding the importance of intense discussion about Cardinal Kasper's propositions, I seek to clarify, in this article, the significance of spiritual communion and its relation to sacramental communion. Then we will be able to see what truly would be necessary for divorced and remarried persons to receive the graces of Communion. Third, I would like to consider an allied issue: the importance of fulfilling the precept to attend Mass on days of obligation, even for those who are not properly disposed to receive Holy Communion. Finally, I propose that the Church's age-old and constant teaching on being properly disposed to receive Holy Communion is an aid in bringing the sinner to repentance in order to benefit from a proper Eucharistic reception.

The Theological Meaning of "Spiritual Communion"

In his twelfth century *Sentences*, Peter Lombard begins his tract on the

² The Italian text of the Cardinal's address, upon which I base my remarks, is found in the on-line version of *Il Foglio Quotidiano: Vaticano Esclusivo* 19, no. 51 (March 1, 2014): "Un avvertimento ci ha dato la Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede già nel 1994 quando ha stabilito – e Papa Benedetto XVI lo ha ribadito durante l'incontro internazionale delle famiglie a Milano nel 2012 – che i divorziati risposati non possono ricevere la comunione sacramentale ma possono ricevere quella spirituale. Certo, questo non vale per tutti i divorziati ma per coloro che sono spiritualmente bene disposti. Nondimeno molti saranno grati per questa risposta, che è una vera apertura. Essa solleva però diverse domande. Infatti, chi riceve la comunione spirituale è una cosa sola con Gesù Cristo; come può quindi essere in contraddizione con il comandamento di Cristo? Perché, quindi, non può ricevere anche la comunione sacramentale? Se escludiamo dai sacramenti i cristiani divorziati risposati che sono disposti ad accostarsi ad essi e li rimandiamo alla via di salvezza extrasacramentale, non mettiamo forse in discussione la struttura fondamentale sacramentale della Chiesa? Allora a che cosa servono la Chiesa e i suoi sacramenti? Non paghiamo con questa risposta un prezzo troppo alto? Alcuni sostengono che proprio la non partecipazione alla comunione è un segno della sacralità del sacramento. La domanda che si pone in risposta è: non è forse una strumentalizzazione della persona che soffre e chiede aiuto se ne facciamo un segno e un avvertimento per gli altri? La lasciamo sacramentalmente morire di fame perché altri vivano?"

Eucharist by noting that while baptism cleanses us from sin, the Eucharist perfects us in the good; it also restores us spiritually. The Eucharist is a “good grace” because, besides increasing virtue and grace in the recipient, one also wholly receives “the fount and origin of all grace.”³ However, not all partake of the Eucharist in the same way. He explains that St. Augustine taught that there are “two ways of taking the Eucharist: one sacramental, namely the one by which the good and bad eat of it; the other spiritual, by which only the good eat.”⁴ Elsewhere, Augustine explains that to eat Christ is “to remain in him, and have him remain in oneself.”⁵ “For he eats spiritually who remains in the unity of Christ and the Church, which the sacrament signifies.”⁶ On the contrary, Augustine says that to receive communion but not to be in “concord with Christ” is to eat unto one’s own condemnation⁷ and “he acquires a great punishment,”⁸ “for a wicked person receives a good thing wickedly.”⁹ Peter Lombard insists that those who are good, that is, disposed to consume the Eucharist worthily, receive Christ’s Body both sacramentally and spiritually. He refers to Pope St. Gregory the Great: “The true flesh of Christ and his true blood are indeed in sinners and in those who receive them unworthily, but in their essence, not in their saving effectiveness.”¹⁰

In the next century, when St. Thomas Aquinas takes up the topic of spiritual communion (*spiritualem manducationem*) he refers, first and foremost, to something that is meant to issue from the sacramental recep-

³ Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, bk iv, d. 8, ch. 1. We call to mind the words of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council in *Lumen Gentium* §11, which describes the Eucharistic sacrifice as “totius vitae christianae fontem et culmen.”

⁴ Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, bk. iv, d. 9, ch. 1, 1, quoting Augustine, *Sermo* 71, c. 11, n. 17.

⁵ Lombard, bk. iv, d. 9, ch. 1, 1, quoting Augustine, *In Ioannem*, tr. 26, n. 18.

⁶ Lombard, bk. iv, d. 9, ch. 1, 1.

⁷ Lombard, bk. iv, d. 9, ch. 1, 1, quoting Augustine in Prosper of Aquitaine, *Sententiae*, n. 341.

⁸ Lombard, bk. iv, d. 9, ch. 1, 2, quoting Augustine, *Sermo* Mai 129, n. 2.

⁹ Lombard, bk. iv, d., 9, ch. 2, 2, quoting Augustine, *In Ioannem*, tr. 62, n. 1. Augustine is drawing, of course, on the teaching of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:27ff concerning those who receive the Eucharist unworthily and draw condemnation upon themselves, which is discussed further below.

¹⁰ Lombard, bk. iv, d. 9, ch. 2, 1, quoting Lanfranc, *De corpore et sanguine Domini*, ch. 20, after the words of Gregory, *Dialogi*, bk. 4, 59.

tion of Holy Communion.¹¹ Only secondarily does Aquinas understand spiritual communion (*voto*) to refer to an interior desire to be united to Christ (73, 3). This is an important point, for it is the actual eating, consuming, of the Body and Blood of Christ that integral to the Eucharist, just as Jesus himself taught as recorded in the sixth chapter of the gospel of John. Nevertheless, the physical eating has spiritual effects.

Aquinas distinguishes two ways of eating (*modi manducandi*) the Eucharist.¹² The perfect way is the actual reception of the Sacrament such that by consuming it one receives its effect—namely, spiritual nourishment as we journey through life on our way to the glory of heaven.¹³ In this way of receiving, we are joined to Christ in faith and charity. For just as we take natural food to sustain the life of the body, the Eucharist sustains the divine life of grace in the soul, which is begun in us at our baptism and which can be lost only by committing mortal sin.

A second way of taking (eating) the Eucharist is without receiving its effect. This is an imperfect reception of the sacrament, Aquinas notes, as when the recipient is impeded from being joined more perfectly in faith and love to Christ. One might think here of situations whereby a person receives the Sacrament distractedly, or unaware, or even after unrepented mortal sin. St. Thomas is very clear: it is possible that no spiritual reality, grace, is received even though one has partaken of the Eucharist. In other words, the reception of Holy Communion necessarily requires proper preparation and disposition, including, at least, both the ability and the intention to receive the grace it contains. The increase of grace in the soul is not automatic, and it certainly is not magical. Just as in human relationships the bond of friendship grows or diminishes based on whether the persons involved are actively seeking each other's good, the grace of deeper friendship with Christ in Holy Communion presumes our hungering for Christ, which is itself a grace from God.

It is important to recognize that Aquinas is making a distinction about what takes place in the act of receiving Holy Communion. In other words, one receives the physical species of the Eucharist *in or-*

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (ST) III, q. 80, a. 1, ad 2.

¹² ST III, q. 80, a. 1.

¹³ ST III, q. 73, a. 1.

der to obtain the spiritual reality of loving union with Christ and the Church. The possibility of receiving the Sacrament without the effect should be an anomaly, not the norm. Otherwise, the purpose of receiving Holy Communion becomes pointless. The corrective is to remedy the situation by removing the obstacle to an effective reception, namely by giving proper attention to Christ's presence while taking the Sacrament in a worthy state. This last point is paramount. Before turning to it, however, let us see what Aquinas has to say about the other sense of the term "spiritual communion."

Today, what we commonly call "spiritual communion" (see page 638) is, for Aquinas, a communion of desire (*in voto*). It is distinct from a spiritual reception, which, as seen above, is the intended effect of actually receiving Holy Communion. Aquinas compares communion *in voto* with baptism of desire (*flaminis*). The baptism of desire is typically understood in the context of a catechumen, who, dying before being baptized with water, but explicitly desiring baptism, is assured salvation (CCC, §1259). However, like baptism, communion *in voto* is an exception to the divine plan for our participation in the Body and Blood of Christ. In other words, Christ established the sacraments to be taken in reality, and not only, or even principally, *in voto*.

Aquinas says that communion *in voto* happens when a person earnestly longs for the actual sacrament. Such a person receives the effects of Holy Communion before receiving it actually or sacramentally. Examples might include the person praying before the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass, or the person confined to a sickbed, or a prisoner confined to prison cell, etc., yet who devoutly desires union with Christ in Holy Communion. Such a reception, *in voto*, though, is secondary to the sacramental eating because it is the actual consuming of the Eucharist that produces in us a greater effect than the effect that comes by a communion of desire.¹⁴ At the same time, the person who devoutly desires the Eucharist, though unable to receive it sacramentally, may obtain the graces of the Eucharist, including: a deeper spiritual union with Christ; healing of the effects of past sins and protection from future ones (venial and mortal); forgiveness of venial sins; a closer union with all the members of Christ's mystical body; and an increase in char-

¹⁴ ST III, q. 80, a. 1, ad 3.

ity that shows itself in caring for the those in need.¹⁵ In short, it is our preparation for heaven, where we will enjoy Christ directly and live in perfect love for all eternity.¹⁶

The Council of Trent on Spiritual Communion

Calling on the teachings of the Fathers, the Council of Trent explains the tri-fold distinction concerning reception of Holy Communion.¹⁷ One may receive

only sacramentally because they are sinners. Others receive it only spiritually; they are the ones who, receiving in desire the heavenly bread put before them, with a living *faith* ‘*working through love*’ (Gal. 5:6), experience its fruit and benefit from it. The third group receive it both sacramentally and spiritually (can. 8); they are the ones who examine and prepare themselves beforehand to approach this divine table, clothed in the wedding garment (cf. Matt. 22:11f).¹⁸

In the chapter just prior to this teaching on Eucharistic reception, during its thirteenth session, the Council insists that the Holy Eucharist may only be received worthily. Given the holiness of this sacrament (and, indeed of all sacraments), the Fathers of Trent reiterate the warning of St. Paul that anyone who eats and drinks of the Eucharist unworthily “eats and drinks judgment on himself” (1 Cor. 11: 29). No one aware of personal mortal sin is to partake of Holy Communion without first having made a sacramental confession, a practice for all Christians, including priests.¹⁹

Canon 11 of the same session of the Council of Trent is even more explicit on the matter of receiving worthily:

¹⁵ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §§1391-1401.

¹⁶ Aquinas also allows for a spiritual communion (*voto*) to take place in anticipation of the sacramental reception of the Eucharist.

¹⁷ There appears to be no direct conciliar teaching about spiritual communion prior to the Council of Trent.

¹⁸ *Council of Trent: Decree on the Sacrament of the Eucharist*, session 13, ch. 8, DS 1648 (all emphases original).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, DS 1647.

If anyone says that faith alone is sufficient preparation for receiving the sacrament of the most Holy Eucharist, let him be anathema. And, lest so great a sacrament be received unworthily and hence unto death and condemnation, this holy council determines and decrees that those whose conscience is burdened with mortal sin, no matter how contrite they may think they are, first must necessarily make a sacramental confession if a confessor is available. If anyone presumes to teach or preach or obstinately maintain or defend in public disputation the opposite of this, he shall by the very fact be excommunicated.²⁰

The *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, issued by Pope Pius V, explains that those who receive only sacramentally are “sinners who do not fear to approach the holy mysteries with polluted lips and heart.”²¹ Quoting Augustine, the catechism continues: “He who dwells not in Christ, and in whom Christ dwells not, most certainly does not eat spiritually His flesh, although carnally and visibly he press with his teeth the Sacrament of His flesh and blood” (*In Joan. Tract.* xxvi, 18). Those who receive the Eucharist spiritually only are those who “partake in wish and desire” though not sacramentally and who receive “if not the entire, at least very great fruits.” To receive both sacramentally and spiritually one must approach the Eucharist with great preparation, wearing “the nuptial garment” (Matt. 22:11) and thus “derive from the Eucharist those most abundant fruits.” To deliberately satisfy oneself with only a spiritual communion is to deprive oneself “of the greatest and most heavenly advantages.” Among the necessary preparations, the catechism includes personal discernment (acknowledgement) of the Real Presence, being at peace with our neighbor, humility, recollection, fasting, and being free of mortal sin through contrition and confession.²²

This teaching has been maintained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.²³ It is worth noting that the German bishops had taken up the

²⁰ Ibid., DS 1661.

²¹ *Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests, Issued by Order of Pope Pius V*, trans. John P. McHugh, O.P., and Charles J. Callan, O.P. (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc., 1934), 245-246.

²² Ibid., 247-48.

²³ See §1385, 1415.

matter in their 1985 catechism for adults, highlighting the triple form of reception of Holy Communion.²⁴ Stating that “unworthy reception of communion by the sinner, whose heart is not prepared for union with Jesus Christ, works not salvation but judgment,” the German bishops insist that “for a spiritually fruitful reception of communion there must be an *examination of conscience* and a *careful preparation*.”²⁵

The Meaning of “Spiritual Communion” in Recent Documents

It is something of surprise to find no mention of eucharistic spiritual communion in either the four constitutions of the Second Vatican Council or the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.²⁶ It is, perhaps, for this reason that the notion of making a spiritual communion is not a familiar option for the faithful of our day. When spiritual communion is mentioned in official Church teaching, it seems to be solely in terms of a communion of desire. For example, Pope John Paul II makes reference to the teaching of St. Teresa in his 2003 encyclical letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* when he writes about attaining perfect union with God:

Precisely for this reason it is good to *cultivate in our hearts a constant desire for the sacrament of the Eucharist*. This was the origin of the practice of ‘spiritual communion,’ which has happily been established in the Church for centuries and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life.²⁷

²⁴ Originally published as *Katholischer Erwachsenen katechismus: Das Glaubensbekenntnis der Kirche* (Bonn: Verband der Diözesen Deutschlands, 1985), the English translation appeared as *The Church's Confession of Faith: A Catholic Catechism for Adults* (Communio Books) (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987). As David L. Schindler, the general editor for Communio Books notes in his opening remarks, the German catechism for adults was “authored largely by Walter Kasper under the aegis of the German Bishops’ Conference” (6).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 292.

²⁶ However, the catechism of the German bishops instructs the faithful about “two ways of communion. There is a simultaneously sacramental and spiritual communion, in which the body of Christ is received bodily and taken into the ready heart at the same time, and also a purely spiritual communion, in which there is union with Jesus Christ through the longing in faith for communion (DS 1648)” (*The Church's Confession of Faith*, 292).

²⁷ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §34, AAS 95 (2003), 456 (emphasis in original).

St. Teresa of Avila is one of the masters that Pope John Paul II has in mind. Her teaching is set in the context of instructing her sisters about how to receive more perfectly the fruits of Holy Communion. In her *Way of Perfection*, St. Teresa writes:

When you do not receive Communion, daughters, but hear Mass, you can make a spiritual communion. Spiritual communion is highly beneficial; through it you can recollect yourselves in the same way after Mass, for the love of this Lord is thereby deeply impressed on the soul. If we prepare ourselves to receive Him, He never fails to give in many ways which we do not understand. It is like approaching a fire; even though the fire may be a large one, it will not be able to warm you well if you turn away and hide your hands, though you will still get more heat than you would if you were in a place without one. But it is something else if we desire to approach Him. If the soul is disposed (I mean, if it wants to get warm), and if it remains there for a while, it will stay warm for many hours.²⁸

An even earlier reference to St. Teresa is found in Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's 1994 *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church Concerning the Reception of Holy Communion by the Divorced and Remarried Members of the Faithful*, which serves as the basis for Cardinal Kasper's question about Holy Communion for the divorced and remarried. In his letter as the Prefect for the CDF, Cardinal Ratzinger upholds the constant teaching of the Church that members of the faithful who live together as husband and wife with someone who is not a legitimate

²⁸ St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, 35,1, in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. 2, trans. Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. and Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2000), 174-75. *Santa Teresa: Obras Completas*, ed. Tomás Álvarez, (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 2009), 606-7: "Y cuando no comulgareis, hijas, y oyereis misa, podéis comulgar espiritualmente, que es de grandísimo provecho, y hacer lo mismo de recogeros después en vos, que es mucho lo que se imprime el amor así de este Señor. Porque aparejándonos a recibir, jamás por muchas maneras deja de dar que no entendemos. Es llegarnos al fuego que, aunque le haya muy grande, si estáis desviadas y escondéis las manos, mal os podéis calentar, aunque todavía da más calor que no estar adonde no haya fuego. Mas otra cosa es querernos llegar a Él, que si el alma está dispuesta – digo que esté con deseo de perder el frío – y se está allí un rato, para muchas horas queda con calor."

spouse may not receive Holy Communion, but are to be instructed in the various ways that they should participate in the life of the Church.

This does not mean that the Church does not take to heart the situation of these faithful, who moreover are not excluded from ecclesial communion. She is concerned to accompany them pastorally and invite them to share in the life of the Church in the measure that is compatible with the dispositions of divine law, from which the Church has no power to dispense. On the other hand, it is necessary to instruct these faithful so that they do not think their participation in the life of the Church is reduced exclusively to the question of the reception of the Eucharist. The faithful are to be helped to deepen their understanding of the value of sharing in the sacrifice of Christ in the Mass, of *spiritual communion*, of prayer, of meditation on the Word of God, and of works of charity and justice (cf. Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, 84).²⁹

The theme of spiritual communion was taken up by Ratzinger again, this time as Pope, in his 2007 post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*. He addresses the issue in the context of *actuoso participatio*, or fruitful participation in the Sacred Liturgy, a matter of cultivating the proper inner disposition for worship. The Pope explains that, while the fullest participation in the Liturgy normally involves

²⁹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Epistula ad catholicam ecclesiam episcopos de receptione communionis eucharisticae a fidelibus qui post divortium novas inierunt nuptias,” §6, AAS 86 (1994): 977 (emphasis mine). Cardinal Ratzinger mentions St. Teresa’s teaching on spiritual communion in footnote 13 of his Letter. He also refers to St. Alphonsus de’Liguori’s *Visite al SS. Sacramento e a Maria Santissima*. St. Alphonsus briefly recalls the teaching of Aquinas on spiritual communion and then gives examples of non-sacramental spiritual communions in the lives of various persons, including St. John of the Cross, Bl. Agatha of the Cross, and St. Peter Faber (made a saint by Pope Francis in December, 2013, using the “equivalent canonization” process), the first companion of St. Ignatius of Loyola. St. Alphonsus recommends making a spiritual communion during visits to the Blessed Sacrament and during Mass. The remainder of his treatise includes meditations and prayers concerning the Holy Eucharist. It should be noted that Pope John Paul II’s 1981 apostolic exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, makes no reference to a eucharistic spiritual communion for divorced and remarried persons in the entirety of the document.

the reception of Holy Communion, not all may approach the altar as though Eucharistic reception is a right or even an obligation. Speaking about the faithful, he says that

care must be taken lest they conclude that the mere fact of their being present in church during the liturgy gives them a right or even an obligation to approach the table of the Eucharist. Even in cases where it is not possible to receive sacramental communion, participation at Mass remains necessary, important, meaningful and fruitful. In such circumstances it is beneficial to cultivate a desire for full union with Christ through the practice of spiritual communion, praised by Pope John Paul II and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life.³⁰

As he had done in his 1994 Letter, Pope Benedict references St. Teresa of Avila, and mentions that “the doctrine [of spiritual communion] was authoritatively confirmed by the Council of Trent, Session XIII, c. VIII.”³¹ The Pope also refers to the teaching of Aquinas, which we have discussed above.

Perhaps there have been, as Benoît-Dominique de La Soujeole, O.P., puts it, “signs of an insufficiently precise drafting” when it comes to recent texts dealing with the issue of spiritual communion (and to which we will return later).³² It is in this framework that we may proceed to examine Cardinal Kasper’s query about Holy Communion for

³⁰ Benedict XVI, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (February 22, 2007), §55, AAS 99 (2007): 148: “Attamen cavendum est ne haec iusta affirmatio forsitan introducat inter fideles quendam automatismum, quasi quispiam ob solam praesentiam in ecclesia, liturgiae tempore, ius habeat, vel forsitan etiam officium, ad Mensam eucharisticam accedendi. Etiam cum non datur facultas ad sacramentalem Communionem accedendi, participatio Sanctae Missae manet necessaria, valida, significans et fructuosa. Bonum est his in rerum adiunctis desiderium plenae cum Christo coniunctionis colere per consuetudinem exempli gratia communionis spiritalis, memoratae a Ioanne Paulo II et commendatae a Sanctis vitae spiritalis moderatoribus.”

³¹ *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n171: “Qui sunt exempli gratia S. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 80, art. 1, 2; S. Teresa a Iesu, *Iter perfectionis*, cap. 35. Doctrina haec confirmata est auctoritate Concilii Tridentini, sess. XIII, c. VIII (DS 1648).”

³² Benoît-Dominique de La Soujeole, O.P., “Communion sacramentelle et communion spirituelle,” *Nova et Vetera* 86 (2011): 152.

the divorced and remarried, making clear what is at stake concerning spiritual communion.

Who May Make a Spiritual Communion?

When Cardinal Kasper wonders if a person who is able to make a spiritual communion (*in voto*) cannot also receive sacramentally, we must respond *sic et non*. Yes, on the one hand, a person who makes a spiritual communion may also receive sacramentally, provided that he or she is properly disposed. But, no, the improperly disposed person may not receive communion sacramentally or even spiritually.

As we have seen, when Aquinas refers to spiritual communion as a communion of desire (*in voto*), he says that it is very much akin to the catechumen desiring baptism (*flaminis*). To desire the sacrament truly is to desire its effect, which, in the case of the Eucharist, is a union of love with Christ and his Church. This union of love necessarily entails, then, desiring and loving all that Christ and the Church desire and love, while at the same time being transformed interiorly, becoming what we consume. The effects of a spiritual communion (*voto*), Aquinas says, are the same as those of sacramental communion.

Cardinal Kasper intimates something similar when he asks how a person who makes a spiritual communion and is one with Jesus Christ can be in contradiction with the commandment of Christ.³³ The Cardinal has come to the heart of the problem: one must accept Christ in his entirety in order to be in communion with him. Since Christ has established the sacramental matrimonial bond as indissoluble, on account of which Christ does not permit divorce and remarriage, a person who attempts remarriage while a previous putative sacramental bond of marriage continues to exist may not lay claim to be one with Jesus Christ, for such a one contradicts at least this part of the commandment of Christ. Thus, such a person is not able to receive communion sacramentally or even spiritually. Only the person who is presently seeking to rectify that which impedes him or her from full communion with Christ may begin to be in a state of making a spiritual communion. This would be exemplified, of course, by the person's external actions which would witness to his or her

³³ Kasper, *Il Foglio*, "Infatti, chi riceve la comunione spirituale è una cosa sola con Gesù Cristo; come può quindi essere in contraddizione con il comandamento di Cristo?"

full acceptance of all that Christ is and all that he teaches. In the meantime, we might speak of a desire for the Eucharist in a person who is not yet in full communion with the commandment of Christ, and this can be the impetus by which such a person takes the practical steps necessary for making both a spiritual and sacramental communion possible.

In an effort to elucidate the problem of the language of desire, Benoît-Dominique de La Soujeole offers a helpful distinction between a sacrament of desire and desiring a sacrament, though I modify his definition of each.³⁴ The sacrament of desire is usually understood as an explicit desire for a sacrament (*voto*) with no interior obstacles from receiving the sacrament, but with some exterior obstacle preventing the person from actually having or receiving the sacrament.³⁵ Thus, as we have already seen, the baptism of desire in the catechumen gives him or her, when the sacramental rite (*sacramentum tantum*) cannot be administered, a participation in the graces (*res*) of baptism, though without baptismal character (*res et sacramentum*). Such would also be the case when St. Teresa urges her sisters, who are unable to receive sacramental communion but who desire to approach the Lord; they receive many graces (the *res* of Communion) insofar as their souls are disposed. Moreover, when it comes to the Eucharist, the sacrament of desire permits a participation in the *res* of the sacrament even in the absence of the *sacramentum tantum*. Such would be the case when one makes a spiritual communion outside of the context of the Mass, even in the absence of the Sacramental Presence.

Desiring a sacrament (*desiderium*), on the other hand, entails explicitly wanting a sacrament but not being properly disposed to receive the *res*

³⁴ La Soujeole, 149-150: "De façon général, il faut distinguer entre un sacrement de désir et le désir d'un sacrement." Fr. La Soujeole seems to restrict the sacrament of desire (*voto*) to the non-Christian "who has never encountered the ecclesial mediation," but who can be baptized by an *implicit* desire and receive the *res* of the sacrament. On the other hand, La Soujeole thinks of the desire of a sacrament as the case of the catechumen with *explicit* desire, which, if animated by faith working through charity, also gives the *res* of the sacrament, though the catechumen would still lack sacramental character.

³⁵ Explicit desire exists in the case of catechumens. There is, of course, the possibility of salvation by implicit desire (*votum implicitum*) "when a person suffers from invincible ignorance" but possesses "a good disposition of soul whereby a person wishes his will be to be conformed to the will of God" (*Letter of the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston, August 8, 1949, DS 3870*).

of the sacrament.³⁶ Both the sacrament of desire and desiring a sacrament involve an explicit desire or wish for the sacrament. They differ, however, inasmuch as the latter, the desire for a sacrament, involves some obstacle (*obex*) to receiving the *res* of the sacrament. So, for example, a person who desires baptism merely in order to mask his affiliation with the Ku Klux Klan would not receive the *res* of baptism. Moreover, such an obstacle could make the baptism fictitious, and the celebration of the *sacramentum tantum* would involve sacrilege. With regard to the Eucharist, merely desiring to receive Holy Communion, even should one whole-heartedly believe in the Real Presence, is insufficient to receive the *res* of the Eucharist. Though the catechumen must possess faith in order to receive baptism, the communicant must possess faith enlivened by charity.³⁷ While the Eucharistic *res* itself increases charity (among its several effects), the absence of charity typically places an *obex* to the *res* of the sacrament. This is true both for sacramental as well as spiritual communion.³⁸

We must be clear about this: not all desiring may be fulfilled.³⁹ This is the case, not because the object is unattainable, but because one lacks the disposition or ability to attain the object. Desire, in and of itself, is not the necessary pre-condition for attaining an object. This is important for our understanding of what is involved in a spiritual communion. While one

³⁶ *Desiderium* is my Latin distinction, and is not found in La Soujeole's article.

³⁷ Concerning the necessity for faith, see *ST* III, q. 68, a. 8. Among the graces infused by baptism is supernatural charity. Cf. *ST* III, q. 69, a. 6, ad 1. Nevertheless, in *ST* III, q. 66, a. 11, when Aquinas speaks about *baptisma flaminis*, as James J. Cunningham, O.P., says, *flaminis*, or the baptism of desire "is not a simple desire for baptism nor the intention to receive the sacrament . . . [it] is rather the result of the activity of the Holy Spirit moving a person to intense charity and burning faith whereby he is drawn to a conversion of life and a complete acceptance of Christ" (*Summa Theologiae*, vol. 57, *Baptism and Confirmation* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975], 49). The point about *flaminis* as more than simple desire is essential to understanding a true communion of desire.

³⁸ It is true that Canon Law provides for the necessity of, say, a priest needing to celebrate Mass and receive Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin, but with the proviso that he will avail himself of the sacrament of penance as soon as possible. Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, cans. 915, 916.

³⁹ Cf. *Letter of the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston, August 8, 1949, DS 3872*, with regard to the desire for baptism: "Nor can it be thought that any kind of desire (*quodcumque voto*) of entering the Church suffices for one to be saved. It is necessary that the desire by which one is related to the Church be animated by perfect charity. The implicit desire (*votum implicitum*) can produce no effect unless a person has supernatural faith."

may wish or desire to go to Holy Communion at some particular Mass, or even wish for the Sacrament from afar (as when not present at Mass), without the proper dispositions to be able to enjoy union with Christ and the Church, the desire amounts to not much more than wistful thinking. It is an inherently frustrated desire. One might say it is not a real desire, for to desire the end is to desire the means to the end. To desire union with Christ, one must also desire to remove whatever obstacles one has placed to this union. No more can a man say that he desires to share in a banquet with an estranged friend while at the same time refusing to lay aside his animosity for the friend than we can approach the Lord's banquet without repenting of our sin. To desire Holy Communion rightly, to make a true spiritual communion, entails being *able* to make such a communion.

So, to reiterate, in response to Cardinal Kasper's concern, yes, the person who makes a spiritual communion should also make a sacramental communion, if he or she is properly disposed. However, it cannot be the case that someone who is not properly disposed to make a sacramental communion could be thought to be able to make a spiritual communion, no matter the circumstances.

Necessary Clarifications

Recalling the Thomistic distinction between spiritual communion as a spiritual eating (*spirituale manducatio*) and as spiritual desire (*voto*), it is clear that for the person who has placed an obstacle to union with Christ by living apart from his commandment neither kind of spiritual commu-

nion is possible. As La Soujeole points out, using the same term, spiritual communion, to refer to two different moral situations and two very different relationships to the Eucharist is problematic.⁴⁰ We are speaking here about proper versus improper disposition for either kind of communion. Though *Sacramentum Caritatis* §55 infelicitously uses the term "spiritual communion" as an option for divorced and remarried persons, a possible reading is that the Holy Father meant to encourage such persons to begin to desire (*desiderare*) appropriately Holy Communion (rather than a communion of desire, to use La Soujeole's distinction), and thus, to rectify their moral situation. Otherwise, the words would indicate that someone

⁴⁰ La Soujeole, 152.

improperly disposed for sacramental communion might still make a spiritual communion. This confusion leads to the logical question raised by Cardinal Kasper. If one is permitted to make a spiritual communion, then why not a sacramental communion?

We must avoid the mistake of thinking that a spiritual communion is the substitute for a sacramental communion for the divorced and remarried, and indeed for anyone prevented from Eucharistic reception on account of mortal sin, La Soujeole warns. The pastoral danger inherent in this belief is that error and confusion about the doctrine of the Church will prevail, leading people “to think that sin which impedes sacramental communion ‘is not so bad’ because one can have the reality of communion anyways. In this case, it is the ordering of sacramental communion to spiritual communion that disappears. Thereby, it is the unity—or better, the identity—of the sign and Eucharistic reality (the true Body of the resurrected Christ) that is at stake.”⁴¹

Moreover, the salvation of souls is at stake. Rather than bringing people to conversion from sin to life in Christ, the flawed solution such as spiritual communion for someone in mortal sin lulls the sinner into a pretense of living the Christian life, including the embrace of the cross of Christ and assuming responsibility for one’s actions and decisions. The inspired words of Scripture, found in St. Paul’s admonition are relevant: “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. . . . For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself.”⁴²

In order to receive the graces of communion with Christ, both sacramental and spiritual, for all persons in any state of life, what is necessary is interior conversion to Christ and a manifestation of this conversion in one’s exterior actions and manner of life. Our external moral life is not the sole indicator of the interior disposition of the soul toward union with God, but the two must at least harmonize. Let us not forget that the end of the sacraments, which Christ himself instituted for our salvation, is a sharing in the Trinitarian com-

⁴¹ La Soujeole, 153.

⁴² 1 Cor 11:27, 29 (RSV). See also *ST* III, q. 80, a. 4: “Et ideo manifestum est quod quicumque cum peccato mortali hoc sacramentum sumit, falsitatem in hoc sacramento committit; et ideo incurrit sacrilegium, tanquam sacramenti violator, et propter hoc mortaliter peccat.”

munion. God, who desires not the death of the sinner (2 Pet 3:9), but that all be saved (1 Tim 2:4), insists that we renounce all that is contrary to his plan for our salvation so that we may attain true and eternal communion with him.

Pope John Paul II spelled out the difficulty in his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*:

The Church reaffirms her practice, which is based upon Sacred Scripture, of not admitting to Eucharistic Communion divorced persons who have remarried. They are unable to be admitted thereto from the fact that their state and condition of life objectively contradict that union of love between Christ and the Church which is signified and effected by the Eucharist.⁴³

Then, speaking of the necessary interior conversion for the divorced and remarried, he continues:

Reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance which would open the way to the Eucharist, can only be granted to those who, repenting of having broken the sign of the Covenant and of fidelity to Christ, are sincerely ready to undertake a way of life that is no longer in contradiction to the indissolubility of marriage. This means, in practice, that when, for serious reasons, such as for example the children's upbringing, a man and a woman cannot satisfy the obligation to separate, they "take on themselves the duty to live in complete continence, that is, by abstinence from the acts proper to married couples."⁴⁴

⁴³ Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, §84, AAS 74 (1982): 185: "Nihilominus Ecclesia inculcate consuetudinem suam, in Sacris ipsis Litteris innixam, non admittendi ad eucharisticam communionem fideles, qui post divortium factum novas nuptias inierunt. Ipsi namque impediunt ne admittantur, cum status eorum et condicio vitae obiective dissideant ab illa amoris coniunctione inter Christum et Ecclesiam, quae Eucharistia significatur atque peragitur."

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, §84, AAS 74 (1982): 186: "Porro reconciliatio in sacramento poenitentiae—quae ad Eucharistiae sacramentum aperit viam—illis unis concede potest, qui dolentes quod signum violaverint Foederis et fidelitatis Christi, sincere parati sunt vitae formam iam non amplius adversam matrimonii indissolubilitati suscipere. Hoc postulat revera ut, quoties vir ac mulier gravibus de causis—verbi gratia, ob liberorum educationem—non valeant necessitate separationis satisfacere, "officium in se suscipiant omnino continenter vivendi, scilicet se abstinendi ab actibus, qui solis coniugibus competent." Cf. John Paul II, Homily at the Close of the Sixth Synod of

Cultic Implications

A truly pastoral response to the person snared in sin and its consequences is not to ignore the situation, or smooth over differences by offering easy solutions as if moral choices have no serious consequences, but to seek the glory of God and the good of all persons through the ministry of the Church. Pope John Paul II urges pastors not to abandon the divorced and remarried to their own devices but to “make untiring efforts to put at their disposal her means of salvation.”⁴⁵ Not only pastors, but the entire community of the faithful, must solicitously take up the responsibility to come to the aid of the divorced and remarried so that “they do not consider themselves as separated from the Church, for as baptized persons they can, and indeed must, share in her life.” The means are plentiful:

They should be encouraged to listen to the word of God, to attend the Sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to contribute to works of charity and to community efforts in favor of justice, to bring up their children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God’s grace. Let the Church pray for them, encourage them and show herself a merciful mother, and thus sustain them in faith and hope.⁴⁶

A too superficial understanding of the working of grace might lead one to think the aforementioned situation is too easy or too hard. On one hand, one may be tempted to think that the Christian life is measured chiefly by external participation (deeds), such as mentioned above: listening to the word of God, attending Mass, and so forth. Such thinking may lead to the conclusion that, if one does these things, then one must

Bishops, 7 (Oct. 25, 1980), AAS 72 (1980): 1082.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 84, AAS 74 (1982): 185: “Nitetur propterea neque umquam defessa curabit Ecclesia ut iis praesto sint salutis instrumenta.”

⁴⁶ Ibid.: “Hortandi praeterea sunt ut verbum Dei exaudiant, sacrificio Missae intersint, preces fundere perseverent, opera caritatis necnon incepta communitatis pro iustitia adiuvent, filios in christiana fide instituant, spiritum et opera paenitentiae colant ut cotidie sic Dei gratiam implorent. Pro illis Ecclesia precetur, eos confirmet, matrem se exhibeat iis misericordem itaque in fide eos speque sustineat.”

be in communion with God, and is therefore fully participating in the Catholic life. This view leads to the denial of (sacramental) reconciliation after a serious fall in sin in order to be in union with God. On the other hand, there is the temptation to view the call to greater participation in divine matters, especially for the person in sin needing reconciliation with God and the Church, as too difficult or even impossible. Such a person labors under the weight of an exaggerated feeling of unworthiness, or worse, hopelessness. This view leads to an abandonment of the life of prayer, going to Mass, and all things associated with God.

However, grace is always at work. Even the “preparation of man for the reception of grace is already a grace.”⁴⁷ The divine plan is to rectify and sanctify every person, so that every person may experience full human flourishing and enjoy the eternal fruits of the friendship that God offers. We must not cloud over the distinction between living in the state of grace and the grace of being moved to contrition. Both habitual graces and actual graces are divine initiatives working to move us to deeper communion. So it is that Pope John Paul II urges divorced and remarried persons to open themselves to the movement of actual graces, such as listening to the Scriptures, attending Mass, praying, and so forth.

The Pope is teaching about the essence of Christian cult. In other words, at the heart of the Catholic Mass is the worship of God the Father as fulfilled in Christ through his perfect and obedient sacrificial self-offering perpetuated in the Eucharist. Ever since the revelation of Christ and the institution of the sacrament of the Eucharist, the only adequate form of worship due to God is through and in Christ, and is supremely consummated through the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy. This is true for all the baptized, whether they are able to participate in Holy Communion or not.⁴⁸ While it is true that the fullest participation in the Sacred Liturgy includes reception of Holy Communion, it is possible (and necessary) to participate in this revealed form of worship without receiving Holy Communion. Reception of the Eucharist indicates communion with Christ and his Church, that, in the state of grace, one holds and believes

⁴⁷ CCC, §2001.

⁴⁸ See my article “How ‘Catholic’ is the Sacred Liturgy? Or: A Mass for the Masses,” *Antiphon* 17 (2013): 212–24.

all that Christ and the Church teach. Among said beliefs is the indissolubility of the sacramental bond of matrimony. As a result, the divorced and remarried, though not properly disposed for the reception of Holy Communion, are able to, and must, worship God by their participation in the Sacred Liturgy.⁴⁹

Participation, of course, is understood as more than mere presence or attendance at the Mass. As *Sacrosanctum Concilium* points out, full, conscious and active participation (*actuosa participationem*) “is demanded by the nature of the liturgy itself; . . . such sharing [*participatio*] is the first, and necessary, source from which believers can imbibe the true Christian spirit.”⁵⁰ Later the Second Vatican Council Fathers spell out the essential aspect of this participation when they describe the heart of Catholic worship:

The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ’s faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God’s word and be nourished at the table of the Lord’s body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, *they should learn also to offer themselves*; through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all.⁵¹

Participation in the Eucharist is not a spectator sport, but involves personal sacrificial offering to the Father through Christ. This is the kind of worship that leads to opening oneself to the grace of repentance and transformation as well as to the grace of perfection.

⁴⁹ See USCCB, “Happy Are Those Called to His Supper: On Preparing to Receive Christ Worthily in the Eucharist,” (Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing, 2006), 9, especially n17.

⁵⁰ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §14.

⁵¹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §48 (emphasis mine).

We find a similar explanation of *participatio* in *Sacramentum Caritatis*:

The Church's great liturgical tradition teaches us that fruitful participation in the liturgy requires that one be personally conformed to the mystery being celebrated, offering one's life to God in unity with the sacrifice of Christ for the salvation of the whole world. . . . [Let the] faithful be helped to make their interior dispositions correspond to their gestures and words.⁵²

As a result of this kind of proper worship, the entirety of one's life is transformed by the grace of configuration to Christ.

Christianity's new worship includes and transfigures every aspect of life: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31). Christians, in all their actions, are called to offer true worship to God. Here the intrinsically eucharistic nature of Christian life begins to take shape. The Eucharist, since it embraces the concrete, everyday existence of the believer, makes possible, day by day, the progressive transfiguration of all those called by grace to reflect the image of the Son of God (cf. *Rom* 8:29ff.). . . . Worship pleasing to God thus becomes a new way of living our whole life, each particular moment of which is lifted up, since it is lived as part of a relationship with Christ and as an offering to God.⁵³

⁵² *Sacramentum Caritatis*, §64, AAS 99 (2007): 152-53: "Ecclesiae insignis liturgica traditio docet ad fructuosam participationem necessarium esse ut quis personaliter respondere studeat Mysterio celebrato, propriam Deo offerens vitam, in coniunctione cum Christi sacrificio pro totius mundi salute. . . . fidelibus intima interiorum sensuum convenientia cum actibus verbisque concinenda curaretur."

⁵³ *Ibid.*, §71, AAS 99 (2007): 159: "Novus christianus cultus complectitur omnem existentiae rationem eamque transformat: "Sive ergo manducatis sive bibitis sive aliud quid facitis, omnia in gloriam Dei facite" (1 Cor 10, 31). In omni vitae actu christianus vocatur ut verum cultum Deo significet. Ex quo formam sumit vitae christianae natura intrinsece eucharistica. Quippe quae credentis humanas res in cotidiana eius ratione involvat, Eucharistia efficit ut de die in diem transfiguretur homo, qui gratia ad imaginem Filii Dei adipiscendam vocatur (cfr *Rom* 8, 29s). . . . Itaque cultus Deo placens novus fit modus vivendi omnia rerum adiuncta existentiae in qua omne singulare elementum exaltatur, quoniam vivitur in relatione cum Christo et sicut oblatio Deo exhibita."

There is no one who will fail to profit from participating, that is, worshipping, at the Mass. Even the person prevented from the fullest expression of worship, the reception of Holy Communion, is still able to receive prevenient graces for repentance, and actual graces for worship.

Not Starvation, But Hunger

In response to Cardinal Kasper's questions about the prospect of Holy Communion for the divorced and remarried, we have shown that it is not possible. Beginning in the patristic era and continuing to our day, we may distinguish two basic forms of receiving Holy Communion. The first, and most efficacious, is the *sacramental reception* of the Body and Blood of the Lord by which one is simultaneously united spiritually to Christ by a kind of spiritual eating. The second is a *spiritual communion* (*in voto*) when one is not able to make a sacramental Communion, granting one is in a state of grace and is able to participate in all the benefits of a sacramental Communion.

Aquinas makes a further distinction with regard to spiritual communion. A spiritual communion, properly speaking, is the spiritual nourishment one receives when partaking of the Eucharist sacramentally; the effects of the Eucharist are produced in the soul of the recipient. Only secondarily does Aquinas think of spiritual communion as a matter of sheer desire for the sacrament (*in voto*) but without access to the sacrament. Nevertheless, it is possible, on account of the love for Christ and wanting to receive him into the soul, that the effects of communion are able to be produced in the soul.

From the teaching of St. Paul to our own day, Tradition has consistently taught the necessity for the recipient of Holy Communion to be in the state of grace. To partake of the Eucharist without the proper disposition, especially failing to seek reconciliation with Christ and the Church through the sacrament of penance when conscious of a mortal sin, is to invite divine judgment, and is itself another serious sin.

While there may be some confusion about the meaning of spiritual communion in recent magisterial teaching, it remains the case that a true spiritual communion is possible only for someone who would normally be disposed to receive communion sacramentally. A spiritual communion is not possible for someone in the state of mortal

sin, including those who have divorced and remarried but whose prior sacramental marital bond continues to exist. Such persons must, by divine law (and even according to natural law), continue to worship God. Every Catholic is obliged to worship God by offering himself or herself to God in union with the offering made through the hands of the priest at Mass.

The Church does not ask, as Cardinal Kasper seems to suggest, that divorced and remarried persons find salvation extra-sacramentally. They are offered the same possibility for conversion and full communion (ecclesially and sacramentally) as for anyone. As he indicates, non-participation in the Eucharist can indeed be a sign of the sacredness of the sacrament. The Cardinal asks if this non-reception of the Eucharist is too high a price to pay? The answer to this question depends on the willingness of the individual to be conformed to Christ. However, we must be clear. It is not the Church who has imposed the obstacle to full communion; it is, rather, the individual who perpetuates a choice to violate a sacramental bond of matrimony. By that action, as with anyone who commits mortal sin, he or she has broken communion. The Church, on the other hand, offers reconciliation for the truly repentant, as she always has.

Then, Cardinal Kasper poses this red herring: Is the rule of non-reception of the Eucharist an exploitation of the person who is suffering and asking for help if we make him a sign and warning for others?⁵⁴ This question more than suggests that the Church has no place in protecting the faithful from the condemnation they bring upon themselves, as St. Paul warns. Were the Church to remain passive and permit Holy Communion for one not properly disposed, she would be liable to judgment for a different kind of exploitation: the failure to keep her children from wrongdoing and sin, as well as the failure to guard faithfully and dispense the sacraments. The Church's long-standing watchfulness is not exploitation or manipulation; it is charity pure and simple. It is the concern of the mother that her children not ingest the wrong medicine lest it become a poison.

As we have already noted above, *Sacramentum Caritatis* teaches that no one has a right to Holy Communion by the mere fact of be-

⁵⁴ See note 2 above for the Italian original.

ing present at Mass. Pope John Paul II also instructs us on this point when he says that “the celebration of the Eucharist, however, cannot be the starting-point for communion; it presupposes that communion already exists, a communion which it seeks to consolidate and bring to perfection.”⁵⁵ Communion, especially as it unites us to the Trinity, presupposes, the Pope says, the life of grace and the practice of the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. He insists, in the words of St. John Chrysostom: “I too raise my voice, I beseech, beg and implore that no one draw near to this sacred table with a sullied and corrupt conscience. Such an act, in fact, can never be called ‘communion,’ not even were we to touch the Lord’s body a thousand times over, but ‘condemnation,’ ‘torment’ and ‘increase of punishment.’”⁵⁶ Then John Paul II urges:

I therefore desire to reaffirm that in the Church there remains in force, now and in the future, the rule by which the Council of Trent gave concrete expression to the Apostle Paul’s stern warning when it affirmed that, in order to receive the Eucharist in a worthy manner, “one must first confess one’s sins, when one is aware of mortal sin” (cf. Ecumenical Council of Trent, Sess. XIII, *Decretum de ss. Eucharistia*, Chapter 7 and Canon 11: DS 1647, 1661). The two sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance are very closely connected. Because the Eucharist makes present the redeeming sacrifice of the Cross, perpetuating it sacramentally, it naturally gives rise to a continuous need for conversion, for a personal response to the appeal made by Saint Paul to the Christians of Corinth: “We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20). If a Christian’s conscience is burdened by serious sin, then the path of penance through the sacrament of Reconciliation becomes necessary for full participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §35, AAS 95 (2003): 457.

⁵⁶ Ibid., §36, quoting *Homiliae in Isaiam* 6, 3, PG 56, 139.

⁵⁷ Ibid., §§36-37, AAS 95 (2003): 458.

Then, as if anticipating the counterargument involving a person's interior judgment, the Pope continues:

The judgment of one's state of grace obviously belongs only to the person involved, since it is a question of examining one's conscience. However, in cases of outward conduct which is seriously, clearly and steadfastly contrary to the moral norm, the Church, in her pastoral concern for the good order of the community and out of respect for the sacrament, cannot fail to feel directly involved. The Code of Canon Law refers to this situation of a manifest lack of proper moral disposition when it states that those who "obstinately persist in manifest grave sin" are not to be admitted to Eucharistic communion."⁵⁸

There is no exploitation of the suffering person, be it the divorced and remarried or even the catechumen (who also must be sacramentally justified before receiving Holy Communion). There is only the outstretched and pierced hand of the Crucified and Risen One who, through the Church, offers salvation for any person who chooses to turn to Christ, embracing him alone even in the most difficult decisions of life. He offers his Body and Blood continually so that all who choose to don the white wedding garment (cf. Mt 22:11-14; Rev 19:8) may enter his eternal banquet. There is, spread before each and every person, the feast of the Eucharist, laid out suchwise that we may all hunger more and more for the Bread of Life, both sacramentally and spiritually. For each and every Christian, repentance is the transformation of starvation into hunger, a hunger Christ promises to satisfy beyond our wildest imaginings. **N&V**

⁵⁸ Ibid., §37, AAS 95 (2003): 458. Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 915; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, can. 712.

