

Spiritual communion available when unable to receive Eucharist

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In his encyclical, "[Ecclesia de Eucharistia](#)" ("A Eucharistic Church"), in April 2003, Pope John Paul II encouraged the practice of spiritual communion, "which has been a wonderful part of Catholic life for centuries and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life."

Spiritual communion isn't as much a part of the Catholic vocabulary and consciousness as it was in the past, though it is just as real an opportunity for eucharistic grace as it ever was. Ironically, the encouragement of actual reception of the Body and Blood of Christ at Mass and the routine availability of eucharistic Communion today, a wonderful development begun in the time of Pope Pius X and emphasized by the Second Vatican Council, may have helped cause this other eucharistic gift to be overshadowed in our time.

What is spiritual communion? St. Thomas Aquinas described it as "an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the most holy sacrament and lovingly embrace him" at a time or in circumstances when we cannot receive him in sacramental Communion. The Catechism of the Council of Trent devoted a special section to spiritual communion in its program of renewal in the late 16th century. In the past, instruction manuals gave as the most familiar situation, the need of a mother to stay home from Sunday Mass to care for a sick child, thereby missing the opportunity for Communion.

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In such cases, the mother could make an act of spiritual communion, uniting herself with the Mass in her parish church and receive the spiritual benefit of Communion. The opportunities for receiving spiritual communion are limitless, but particular circumstances make it appealing in our time. Today there are many Catholics who may not be able to receive Communion because of a marriage not recognized by the Church. Often they are in a process of getting their marital status rectified, but until that is done, they cannot participate.

But they are not prohibited from receiving Communion spiritually and receiving strength from the grace of the sacrament during a waiting period which is often painful. As the availability of priestly ministry decreases, daily Mass becomes more and more scarce, and some communities may not regularly have even a Communion service on Sunday. In our mobile society, people who otherwise might be at Mass are frequently on the move.

Spiritual communion needs no special instruction; it only requires the same disposition as the actual reception of the sacrament and a turning to Jesus with the heart. These days as we experience a renewal of eucharistic adoration, those who come to spend time in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament are receiving spiritual communion, even though they may not have called it by that name.

Prayer of Spiritual Communion

No particular prayer or formulary is required, though there are acts of spiritual communion in Catholic prayer books to help focus a proper intention. One of the most popular is that composed by St. Alphonsus Liguori:

“My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the Blessed Sacrament.
I love you above all things and I desire you with all my heart.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
I embrace you as if you were already in my heart
and unite myself to you completely.
Please do not let me ever be separated from you.”

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