



Allocutio



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Allocutio: Who can receive the Eucharist?

What are the conditions so that someone may receive Holy Communion in our Catholic Church? We can put it simply this way: those who may receive communion freely are baptised Catholics who are in a state of grace, have no impediment and are rightly disposed. Others who have received a true or valid baptism but not in full communion with the Catholic Church may also receive under certain conditions.

Rightly disposed means that the person understands what they are doing and have a desire to receive Jesus, who died for our sins but is gloriously risen and present under the appearances of the sacred species of bread and wine. This awareness is not presumed before the age of reason and may not be there in some cases until well after. It requires not just a cold belief (the devils too know that it is Jesus) but of a warm desire for Jesus in our hearts. We should go to communion because we love Jesus and desire his presence in our souls and because we seek to deepen a relationship with him. This love is damaged seriously by mortal sin and the Church asks that the person who has so offended must receive sacramental absolution before they come to receive Jesus. Mortal sin always involves a deliberate seriously bad act which can only imply a break in relationship with God at the level of faith, hope or charity.

It can happen for many reasons that a person may not be able to get to confession after committing a mortal sin. In such cases a perfect act of contrition, that is one based on a real sorrow for sin out of love of Jesus and a firm purpose of amendment, must be made before the person receives. Proof of the purpose of amendment is shown by a determination to go to confession as soon as this is at all possible. To go to communion because you want to be seen or to give an impression to someone else is not a good disposition.

I mentioned that there should be no impediment. By that I am not referring to mortal sin. An impediment is an obstacle laid down by the community which blocks certain people from receiving communion. It does not always imply that a mortal sin has been committed. For example the first impediment arises if the person is not baptised. Baptism is the gateway to the rest of the sacraments. As an absolute requisite before anyone can receive communion a person is required to make a public statement of faith in Jesus Christ in baptism or as when an infant or junior child is presented by a parent or some other guardian who has faith and promises to share the faith with the child.

But the person must also be a Catholic to receive communion in our Church. Any Orthodox person is also free to receive communion in our Church if they freely choose. This is because their faith and understanding and intention are the same as ours. Members of the Churches of the Reform cannot as a rule receive communion in our Church. By way of exception they may be allowed to receive on special occasions if they show that they share the same faith in the Eucharist that we have and if they are suitable disposed. The bishop's permission is required for this.

But there can also be impediments on Catholics. If a person is excommunicated they are barred from receiving the Eucharist and must undertake the reform asked by the Church to prove their repentance because excommunication normally implies a very serious violation of a law so much so that it constitutes a grave sin.

People living in a second union after they married are also asked to refrain from coming to communion because objectively they are living in a state of adultery. Let me clarify this. It sometimes happens that a person suffers a breakdown of their marriage. This is not a reason for not coming to communion. A person in such a situation may well need the close friendship of Jesus and is not barred. A



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person who gets a civil divorce is not necessarily barred from communion either. The Catechism of the Church, if you look at it carefully, allows that in certain civil jurisdictions it is okay to seek a civil divorce, because it may be the only way to obtain just benefits. The key is the intention. Our Lord's words were clear: "He who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery". The sin of adultery is the living with the other person and having sexual relations. It is the adultery which creates the situation of serious sin. If someone meets another person and has a good quality friendship but does not have sexual relations they are free to receive communion. But if they have sex then they commit adultery which is a serious sin.

It can happen that sometimes a person suffers a bad marriage and they find a "partner" who in fact is everything that a husband or wife should be. And sometimes when you compare this with the first relationship it is such an improvement. The second relationship shows all the signs of being the way God meant it to be: the couple are getting on well and the children are happy and live in an environment of love. This is a most difficult issue in the Church. Until such times as they can regularise their situation such couples, even if in God's eyes they are not in grave sin, may not receive communion because objectively it would signal that adultery is okay. They should be encouraged to seek an annulment or get a dispensation if the case allows. But I must say that this kind of impediment is not excommunication.

When you come across cases of people in such situations it is important to bring them friendship and love and invite them still to be part of the Church. Let me end with a quote from Pope Benedict, "The Synod of Bishops confirmed the Church's practice ... of not admitting the divorced and re-married to the sacraments ... Yet the divorced and re-married continue to belong to the Church which accompanies them with special concern and encourages them to live as fully as possible the Christian life through regular participation at Mass, albeit without receiving communion, listening to the word of God, eucharistic adoration, prayer, participation in the life of the community, honest dialogue with a ... spiritual director, dedication to the life of charity, works of penance, and commitment to the education of their children ... Finally where the nullity of a marriage bond is not declared and objective circumstances make it impossible to cease cohabitation, the Church encourages these members of the faithful to commit themselves to living their relationship in fidelity to the demands of God's law, as friends, as brother and sister; in this way they will be able to return to the table of the Eucharist, taking care to observe the Church's established practice in this regard. This path ... can never involve the blessing of these relations, lest confusion arise among the faithful concerning the value of marriage" (Sacramentum Caritatis n.29).

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill