



## THE SACRAMENTS AND THE EPIDEMIC: MASS AND HOLY COMMUNION some tips from the Latin Mass Society in light of the Extraordinary Form and the Traditional Practice and Discipline of the Church

### 1. Mass-going and Participation in the Mass

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the central act of the Catholic liturgy. It is continuously offered by our priests all over the globe. Whenever it is impossible to attend Mass, this fact must serve to console us, and we can unite ourselves spiritually with the Masses being offered now by priests both known and unknown to us, perhaps in the next parish, or on the other side of the world.

These Masses, whether celebrated with or without a congregation, are offered ‘for the living and the dead’, bringing blessings down upon the Church and the world, and in a special way on those for whom Mass is being offered.

When we can attend, the reception of Holy Communion is the most intense form of participation, but certainly not the only one. We offer ourselves with the priest’s offering of Our Lord, the perfect Sacrificial Victim.

Our obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation (such as the Annunciation) has been lifted, but we can still make these days holy and distinct from our usual routine, by our spiritual participation in Mass and by resting from those works incompatible with the prayer and recreation proper to the day.<sup>1</sup>

Those unable to attend Mass and receive Holy Communion in the normal way may find it helpful to consider the following.

- a) To deepen our appreciation of the Mass, read about the Mass, both in general and the proper texts of the Masses being celebrated each day, for the feasts and seasons of the Church’s year, remembering that Masses are still being celebrated, if behind closed doors.
- b) It is still possible to ask priests to offer Masses for special intentions, including for the dead. It is customary, though not essential, to give priests a small ‘Mass Offering’ when doing so, customarily £10.
- c) Particularly when we would normally be obliged to attend Mass, if we are unable to do so we are encouraged to pray the prayers of the Mass of the day and to unite ourselves with the Sacrifice. This may be assisted, and the habits of Mass-going maintained in a certain way, by watching a livestreamed Mass online.
- d) We should keep Sundays and Holy Days special by our devotional observances and rest from unnecessary work.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [2185](#)

## 2. Holy Communion

Our normal Sunday obligation is to attend Mass, not to receive Holy Communion. In past ages, while attending Mass on Sundays or even daily, Catholics commonly received infrequently, even as infrequently as once a year. When they did receive, they did so after intense preparation, and very often after Confession and Absolution. Fewer, more fervent, receptions of Holy Communion may be preferable to more frequent receptions without proper preparation and thanksgiving, which do not lead to abundant graces. Worse still are those receptions made in a state of serious sin.

A laudable practice when one cannot receive Holy Communion sacramentally is to make a ‘Spiritual Communion’: a prayer asking Our Lord to enter our hearts, if not sacramentally, then through grace. This can also form part of our long-term preparation for the most recollected and fruitful reception of Holy Communion possible, when we are again able to receive It.

Holy Communion may be given outside Mass, as well as during Mass, and indeed this was until a century ago the most widespread practice. It is still given outside Mass to the sick and housebound, and our priests will do their best to make Holy Communion, along with the Sacrament of the Sick, available to those who are seriously ill. It is our responsibility to ensure that if a loved one is in this situation, the hospital chaplain or parish priest (or another priest willing to make the journey) knows of this need. They will also be able to hear Confessions and give the Sacrament of the Sick when needed.

If we are unable to attend Mass, we, like the sick, are in the situation of not being able to receive Holy Communion in the normal way. While the needs of the sick are paramount, depending on the restrictions in place at a given time it may be possible for priests to give Holy Communion in a controlled way outside Mass to others who request it. In the circumstances of an epidemic, this will need to be arranged in advance. There is a special ceremony in the *Roman Ritual* for Communion outside Mass in accordance with the norms of the Extraordinary Form.

To summarise:

- a) While we are prevented from making our usual Communion at Mass we should make a virtue of necessity by ensuring that at our next opportunity our reception of Holy Communion is as fervent as possible, by preparing ourselves not only immediately before that, but throughout our lives.
- b) Part of this preparation is the making of Acts of Spiritual Communion.
- c) We must ensure that the priests are informed about the sick and hospitalised.
- d) It may be possible under certain degrees of ‘lockdown’ for even those not sick to receive Holy Communion outside Mass by arrangement with a priest.

An Act of Spiritual Communion, by St Alphonsus Ligouri

My Jesus, I believe that thou art present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love thee above all things, and I desire to receive thee in my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive thee sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace thee as if thou wert already there, and unite myself wholly to thee. Never permit me to be separated from thee. Amen.