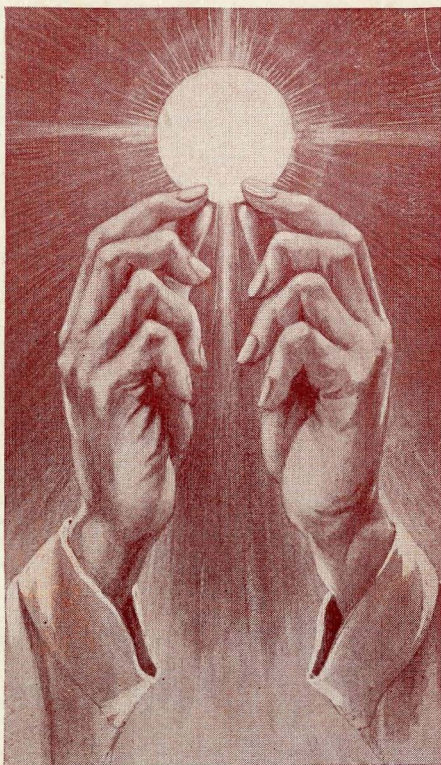


Maloney, James A.
Frequent Communion
ADU 0896

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By REV. JAMES A. MALONEY



THE PAULIST PRESS
401 West 59th Street
New York 19, N. Y.

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By
REV. JAMES A. MALONEY

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PRINTED AND PUBLISHED IN THE U. S. A.
BY THE PAULIST PRESS, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

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"THIS IS MY BODY; THIS IS MY BLOOD"

THE SAULIST PRESS
401 West 25th Street
New York, N. Y.

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FREQUENT COMMUNION FOR YOUNG AND OLD

HIS HOLINESS, POPE PIUS X, in 1905, through a solemn decree of the Sacred Congregation reasserted the right and the duty respecting young children of feeding upon the Body of Jesus Christ in Holy Communion. The bishops to whom the decree was primarily addressed because each is sole pastor of his diocesan people, immediately instructed the priests to begin at once distributing the Bread of Life to their little ones and thus conform to the positive behest of the Holy Father, who himself expressed again the mind of our Blessed Lord and of His holy Church. The decree in question furnished abundant documents showing the teaching and the practice of the Catholic Church from apostolic beginnings down through the ages until this present day. It leaves us no option in the matter of giving Communion to young children when their little minds, like so many budding flowers, begin to open in the light of human understanding, which is commonly supposed to be about the age of seven years. Nor does the decree leave our own maturer minds in doubt upon so capital a question, for it unequivocally lays down in the plain and solemn language of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of the Lateran, the true and only belief of Catholics.

Formula of the Lateran Council

“If any one shall deny that all the faithful of both sexes, *who have attained the use of reason are obliged* to receive Communion every year, at least at Easter time, according to the precepts of holy Mother Church, let him be anathema.”

This formula and others like it coerce not the Catholic

into believing, but rather give him cause to rejoice in the acquisition of certain truth: one of intellectual freedom's proudest faculties is the power of embracing heartily every undeniable proposition.

The Ancient and Oriental Custom

Before dwelling at greater length upon this indubitable teaching of the Church, it will be well to state at once and briefly the authorized custom in the giving of Communion formerly and at present in the Eastern Churches and in the West. From the very beginning it has been the practice, as it is today in the Orient, to administer the Eucharist immediately after baptism to mere infants. Until the thirteenth century this same practice was prescribed and obtained throughout the universal Church. About that date, however, another custom began to take root and grow and spread abroad far and wide, until it was formally and authoritatively approved and prescribed by the Lateran Council for the entire Latin Church. That custom has been ratified again and again by our highest authority upon earth, notably by the great Council of Trent: it is the practice which Pope Pius X would have prevail everywhere under the Latin rite, and utterly supplant the manifest abuse of denying to a portion of those who have a right to it participation in the divine sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Now who precisely are those that have not only the right, but a duty likewise, to eat at the table of the Lord? At the very least, all those who, in the words of the Council, have attained the use of reason.

The Exercise of Reason

The question consequently is not of seven years, of ten, or of fourteen strictly speaking, since the light of reason breaks through the individual brain not according to the number of years it has taken to develop but in accordance

with the required development. It not infrequently happens that a bright child of six has keener intellectual vision than a dull-brained child of eight. Observation has averaged the various ages at which children begin to exercise their hitherto latent understanding at seven years. In a very general way the abuses deplored by the Holy Father originated in the view taken of the phrase "use of reason." Two causes for the condemned practice of deferring Communion till the age of ten or twelve have been specified and reprobated by the Pope; the innovators unreasonably required a better drilling in Christian doctrine for the Blessed Eucharist than for the Sacrament of Penance. Their mind upon this matter is easily inferred from the fact that they admitted the child to confession long before he was entitled in their estimation to receive First Communion. Examination in the catechism was employed as a test for discrimination among the candidates. Another cause of this comparatively modern innovation was an error borrowed from the Jansenists which manifested itself in the undue insistence upon an exaggerated preparation of soul for the becoming reception of Holy Communion. The belief that the Holy Eucharist should be given as a reward only, not as a bracing stimulant and needful corroboration of human frailty, showed a faith tainted by heretical teachers. The Middle Age Angelic Doctor not only wrote "*Tantum ergo Sacramentum veneremur cernui,*" but likewise "*O salutaris Hostia . . . da robur fer auxilium.*" If extraordinary preparation were essential, how could infants incapable of preparation have been permitted to receive?

Ability to discriminate between what is right and what is wrong requires some use of the reason and betokens the possibility of committing sin. If, then, admission to the sacrament of penance presupposes the use of reason, what else does the denial of admission to Communion at the same age imply but that the use of reason does not qualify for reception of the Eucharist? And this denial incurs the Coun-

cil's anathema. The abuse based upon it does downright injustice to young children, endangers early innocence, and thwarts the undoubted desire of Jesus Christ.

The Purpose of the Eucharist

The Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist was instituted by our loving Lord to be the instrument for uniting all men to His own mystical Body. Salvation is utterly impossible for any one not so united. Christ is the head of the invisible body, men are the members. He is the vine, we are the branches. Severed from the head the life-giving center, a member must necessarily die; the branch cut off from the trunk can evidently receive no sap, it can only wither in death. Our divine Savior, eternally God, but man also from the time of His Incarnation, is the only Mediator between man and his Maker. By ineffable union the human nature of our blessed Redeemer is linked to the divine. It may reverently be said that on one side Jesus Christ is man, while on the other side He is very God. By incorporation with the God-man we are thus brought into saving contact with the Deity through the intermediation of Him Who died for us on a cross. To become incorporated requires a divine operation and the instrument fashioned for that purpose at His last supper upon earth by a divine Person is no other than the Holy Eucharist. By Communion we are intimately united to the Head of the mystical body and in that way brought into the merciful embrace of the Divinity. There is no other door which will open into heaven for us but Jesus Christ. Through Him we must pass to, or forever remain outcasts from, that beautiful home on high. Said Christ: "become like little children" first, then "come ye all to Me: I am the Way." The objection is invalid which would deny this eucharistic instrumentality on the ground that baptized infants and some adult lovers of their Lord can see salvation without the actual reception of Holy Communion.

The same objection would tell with equal cogency against the necessity of sacramental baptism; for some are saved who have never been actually washed by the cleansing waters. In both cases the virtual stands for the actual reception of the sacrament. That little children can be saved without their First Communion is no argument, therefore, against the approved custom strenuously emphasized by Pius X of giving Communion to all those capable of discriminating between this sacred food received at the holy table of the Lord and the ordinary victuals served them in the dining-room at home. Our Savior has said: "My Flesh is real food, and My Blood is real drink." The flour and water wafer has been changed from bread into the living Body of Christ. It still looks like common food, for its appearance was not changed. It looks like bread in order to show that what we receive is food, though not of the common sort but the bread of angels. The sacred Body into which the bread is changed being alive has blood and soul, and being the Body of Jesus Christ it is that of a divine Person. The faintest glimmer of budding reason will suffice for a child's understanding of the change of one thing into another, the difference between a dead body and one that is alive, and what it is to be God and not a man. A lifeless lesson from the bare catechism may not set things in the faint light of the child mind, but the priest or any other teacher who has learned the simple and natural mode of communicating elementary truths will be fairly understood after the fashion of a child. He has but to remember his former self in order to be at home immediately in the talk that conveys the ideas of children to a little child.

The Requirement for First Communion

Moreover, the foregoing simple information is by no means a requirement or a test for First Communion. Nothing more in the way of enlightenment is required than the knowledge

that Communion is not common but sacred food for the soul. It is a young child, indeed, who does not know that God above will reward the good in heaven and punish the wicked in hell. Besides, every child who has a mother knows something of love and will understand what a favor it is to be the friend and beloved of Jesus. What answer will they make who are called to account for unduly keeping apart two such pure lovers as Jesus and the child, the Lamb of God from a lamb of His own flock? This human lamb, moreover, is in constant danger of being carried off and devoured by a roaring lion who is forever roaming around through this wilderness of a world savagely seeking for prey. Would you be so cruel, so manifestly unjust, as to forbid him the protection of One in Whose presence the devil trembles while recalling to mind the grinding heel that crushed his serpent's head? Would you hold back that little spouse of Our Savior till spiritually starved into the commission of mortal sin and disrobed of her snow-white innocence before her wedding day? Would you not rather introduce at an early age the children of your flock to One Who is the Way in the only true sense; lead them into the true light of Him Who is Truth itself; and direct their innocent steps afield to the rich pastures and living manna provided for them by their dearest Shepherd Who is Himself the Life?

He is "the living bread that came down from heaven," not really like that manna of old which kept men alive for a time, but could not confer immortality: the youngest child that eats this heavenly bread will never die for "he shall live forever." "Suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not" is as authoritatively interpreted by the Pope a divine injunction to give Communion to little ones as well. The Holy Eucharist is the sacrament which unites us to Christ: love means union, and Jesus loved the children. The white purity of their innocent souls has a charm for the innocent Lamb of God, Who loves them with more than ma-

ternal tenderness, and longs for the holy hour when they shall sit down at the same table with the senior members of the household. With His own sacred hands our blessed Savior will break for their eating the Bread of Life. He will feed His flock like a shepherd, giving special care to the lambs of the flock, occasionally taking them up by turn into His arms to foster, fondle and caress them. Is there a heart so wanting in responsive tenderness as not to be touched by such divine embracements? Who will have the irrational hardihood to repulse those children, who come flocking round the mild and attractive Person of Jesus Christ? Do you not dread the indignant reprimand of their gentle Lord, lovingly occupied in laying a hand here and there upon each young head, embracing them one by one and blessing them all together? He loved to have the white-souled little ones come trooping trustfully to His presence and gloried in beholding Himself the heavenly magnet attracting their young hearts.

Who Shall Decide?

To resume and enforce in sober statement the compelling statutory commands of Pope Pius X and the Church, no one is allowed in practice or belief to deny that every Catholic, whatever be his age, who has the use of reason is not merely allowed but strictly obliged to receive Communion. Who shall decide for young children unable to form a decision for themselves? The natural father of the child is bound in conscience to watch that little one's mind unfold as the body develops and at the first efflorescence of reason to take steps to have that youthful candidate for Holy Communion conducted to the holy table of the Lord, to be intimately and mysteriously united to Him and fed upon the spiritual Food of His sacred Body and most precious Blood. As confession always precedes First Communion, the confessor has an opportunity of obeying the injunction given to him and forming

the final decision regarding the fact of the child's capability to discern the Body of the Lord which he proposes to receive. Beyond the necessary condition of sanctifying grace, the confessor has nothing to pass upon but that question of fact, namely, whether or not this candidate for First Communion has come to the use of reason. Granting the use of reason, the child's right and duty to communicate are undeniable and the confessor is not at liberty to deny him Holy Communion. In ministering to the spiritual needs of a parish, discipline is a prime necessity and the pastor must be its head master. Will not this decree occasion a clash between the disciplinary chief and the confessor, by assigning to the latter a duty which has hitherto been performed by the pastor? Not necessarily nor even likely, for the reasonable rector, in conformity with the decree, will look for children about the age of seven to receive First Communion, leaving the confessor to decide in each individual case regarding the child's mental capacity. When the candidate informs his pastor that his confessor did not judge him fit the matter will be settled, and no rational pastor will interfere with the execution of the law. Some method will probably be adopted to insure order and instead of a disorderly First Communion of one now, and again another, general First Communion will take place at stated times, say at the same intervals as for the periodic confession of children, thus guaranteeing the edifying memory of a great day in the history of every Catholic life. To impart richness and robust vigor to that life, frequent and even daily Communion is strongly recommended.

The Sacramental Life

By a sacrament we are born again to a new life, by a sacrament we are brought to full spiritual stature, by a sacrament the wounds of the soul, though they be mortal, are healed; so likewise we are fed and our spiritual life is sus-

tained by a sacrament, which is called the Holy Eucharist, and contains the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. This life of the soul is maintained and fostered by eating "that Bread which came down from heaven," much in the same way as our natural life is supported by eating our ordinary meals; for the natural has been made after the pattern of the supernatural. We were born first by natural generation in order to be born again by water and the Holy Ghost. Were there no heaven, there would be no earth. Time is because of eternity. The bodily life is for the sake of the life eternal. This participation of the divine life, means that God lives in us and we in Him, and that as the Son has by nature the same life as the Father in its infinite fullness so we share it by grace. This new life, as well as the old, requires food for its maintenance. Being better acquainted with the needs of the common life of nature, we are accustomed to use the light of this knowledge in our understanding of the supernatural. And as we know that lack of food for a protracted period results in death, so we say by analogy that to deprive the soul of its heavenly sustenance for an undue time causes spiritual starvation or cessation of the new life. The analogy goes further; for as we debilitate, without destroying, our bodily life by stinting the supply of nourishment, so we can weaken and cause partial paralysis of the soul by unduly prolonging the interval between our Communions.

Furthermore, proper frequency and regularity of meals will keep the body up to its work and in a condition of vigorous health; in a somewhat similar way frequent Communion tones up the soul, gives it strength and suppleness, renders it solid and steady as the impregnable rock. The quality also of our daily victuals has much to do with our bodily well-being; but the excellence of the Divine Food is unquestionable. Excellent food is best adapted for assimilation; the Food prepared for us by Christ is assimilated in such a way

that we are transformed into Him. Food that is well assimilated is profitably eaten at frequent intervals, for in such case "good digestion waits on appetite and health on both." A healthy condition of body is dependent also upon medicine, particularly in acute passages of life. Ordinary food is medicinal as well as nourishing, and so is spiritual refec-tion through Holy Communion. It expels the noxious humors of a libidinous body, allays the unruly fervor of the passions, soothes the chafing of an irascible temper, brings down the dangerous inflammation of a haughty mind, ac-celerates the action of a sluggish heart, and reduces that excessive temperature of a disordered soul which is unquestionably fatal if not timely checked.

An Invigorating Power

The Council of Trent, cited by the Pope in this decree, calls Communion "an antidote." Its medicinal action se-cures us against the poison of mortal sin. By corroborating the soul's stamina it bestows the power of resisting the assaults of innumerable baccili and dislodging the fatal germ. In the same way it guarantees the soul against smaller faults; as the well-toned body is analogously preserved from the common slight colds and similar small ailments. No won-der, then, that it is the wish of the Church and the expressed desire of the celebrated Ecumenical Synod of Trent "that at every Mass the faithful who are present should com-municate." Pope Pius X in another decree published by his command in 1905, declared that in composing the Lord's Prayer Christ meant us to ask the Father to give us this celestial Bread daily; in other words, our blessed Savior wished us to be daily communicants. By means of the Eucharistic Sacrament we are united to God; in union there is strength, particularly where the union is with One Who is omnipotent. The frailty of our tainted nature should of

itself suggest association with the strong. Many, on the contrary, make their own weakness the cause of keeping them away from the holy table; they do not count themselves entitled to frequent Communion till they have become better Christians. This is like abstaining from your victuals because you have not yet the strength which comes from frequent, regular, and fortifying food. The Pope insists upon it that Communion is not reserved for the pious devotee. To take up again the analogy between nature and grace, between what is fitting for the man and what is suitable for the Christian, I observe that as those who are ill should visit the doctor and take his medicine, so also the Catholic who feels his own weakness and has experienced frequent fits of spiritual *ennui* and is fearful of being unable to persevere in well-doing, is the one man above all others who has need of frequently feeding upon the Body of Jesus Christ and, if it were possible, of going daily to Communion.

The Invitation of Christ

You can legitimately fancy our blessed Savior preaching from the tabernacle and saying: "Come ye all to Me"; for "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners; they that are well do not need a physician, but they that are ill." In the decree on Frequent and Daily Communion we find these words: "The primary purpose of the Blessed Sacrament is not that the honor and reverence due to Our Lord may be safeguarded or that Holy Communion may serve as a reward of virtue." In all His labors, wonder-workings, and speeches Christ's main object was the eternal welfare of the world; so when He cried out with gentle tenderness and touching pity for mankind: "Oh, come to Me all ye who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest," the prime meaning was this profound one: You who are most miserable, receiving here the hard buffets of fortune and no

hope of an eternal reward hereafter; you who are crushed to earth by the heavy burden of all the ills which men are heir to; you who are poor wanderers in this thorny vale of tears, "like sheep without a shepherd when the snow shuts out the sky"; you who labor hard, receiving but a wretched, temporary, evanescent reward for your labors and are withal borne down by the inward weight of your own sins—oh, come to Me, and I will give your wandering minds the steady light of divine faith to guide them, your despairing souls the cheering prospect of better times in the world to come, and your chilled hearts the fire of true love which will make all things come easy to you: I will give you the repose of a good conscience here and the delightful rest of paradise when your work is finished. "The labor we delight in physics pain;" Christ bestows that love which lightens labor: He is our Physician. To Him we go by Communion, and He comes home with us, abides in the house of our soul, watches over us in our daily avocations, steadies our steps again when we stumble, and is ever by our side, cheering us by pointing to the great reward, and showing the tried affection of a true Friend: "Greater love no man hath."

Effects of Holy Communion

Union with Christ entails a new instalment of that grace which makes the soul pleasing to the eye of God and gives increased stability to every good habit of mind and heart. The frequent Communicant has a keener vision of the world invisible, a more abiding trust and ineradicable hope in God, and a deeper love of Jesus which is proof against every temptation to betray the Master. Daily Communion is apt to intensify that salutary fear of the Lord, which is a gift of the Holy Ghost; it is meant to make us look more lovingly toward God as our Father and through love to keep His law; it will have the effect of stiffening anew our resolve to put nothing before the observance of that law; it greatly quickens

that spiritual instinct by which we readily discern the divine will in our regard; it keeps us more on the alert to guard against the wiles of the enemy; it reanimates our taste for spiritual things so that we may inwardly rejoice in God's service and be jealous of His honor on all occasions. To receive daily is to go to school every day to the best Master and have our minds disciplined to drink in the spirit of Christ's Gospel and acquire a lucid view of its contents.

Our actions rise out of our thoughts, and practice opposed to the wisdom of Christ can be traced to that wisdom of this world which is foolishness with God. It is of paramount importance to fill the mind with religious truth well-digested and thoroughly assimilated, till it saturates the soul and is woven into the texture of the brain. This can be done only by conforming one's own life to that of Jesus Christ. He is truth, and in Him we shall see light. In Christ there is no darkness, and association with Him will free us more and more from that blindness of mind caused by the exhalations reeking up from an unpurified heart. Those who receive their Lord often will gradually and progressively acquire His spirit and so be able to penetrate to the marrow of the good tidings and realize the Gospel by a profound synthetic factor of mind and heart. That discipline of the mind and mental furnishing which run counter to the Christian doctrine is worse than worthless. Christ is the Light of the world, and every intellectual torch not kindled thereat gives but a lurid flame and blinding smoke. If the child of seven sees First Communion only by the faint light of dawning reason, frequent Communion afterwards, by union of his soul to the living Luminary, will awaken and develop that noble gift of understanding with which he was endowed in baptism. And what is more, his little mind will be informed in such fashion as to enlist the feelings of his whole spirit and cause him to grow up into the completeness of a logically consistent Christian man.

Viewing All Things in Christ

Be he young or old the thorough-going Catholic who keeps constantly communicating with Christ in the Eucharist will view all things in Him, follow the radiating line of every human happening to the one Center of all, and steady his own mind by contemplating created things in the majestic unity of the Creator. To do this is true wisdom, nor is there any other philosophy worthy of the name. The Eucharistic Christ will impart that meek and lowly spirit which characterized his own blessed Mother and to which He has attached the promise of a Kingdom. He will speak whispered words of comfort to the sorrow-laden, fill with satisfying sweetness the upright heart of him who would have justice prevail though the skies should fall down upon our heads, mould the spirit of man to mercy toward his fellows and thus insure the divine mercy for himself, create a pure heart within the human breast and purge the inward eye, enabling it to behold the invisible God; fortify the soul to suffer for truth's sake and temper the entire man to considerate forbearance and love of peace. If Communion intensifies the sevenfold gift accompanying sanctifying grace and that gift entails the fruits of the Holy Ghost, the oftener we sit down to the Eucharistic banquet the greater should be our charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, long-suffering, mildness, faith, modesty, continency, chastity.

The Seed of Immortality

These graces, gifts, and blessings primarily affect the spiritual part; but noble as it is by origin and by nature, the soul does not constitute the man. The body is part of his substance, and though lapsing into inorganic earth when forsaken by the immortal spirit, will one day be reorganized, reunited, and share the superior partner's immortality. "It is sown in corruption; it will rise in incorruption. It is sown a mortal body; it will rise a spiritual body." In ex-

pressing this consoling truth revealed to us from heaven through St. Paul, the inspired apostle employs a figure of speech, comparing the body's burial in the earth to the agricultural operation of sowing. Now the seed of immortality, which according to divine promise will germinate at the final consummation, is sown in the living body by Holy Communion. Christ has said: "He who eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood . . . I will raise him up at the last day." Speaking to Martha, inconsolable for the loss of her brother Lazarus, who was dead and buried four days, the weeping Jesus Who loved Lazarus, said to the sister: "Your brother shall rise again." Martha said to Him: "I know that he shall rise again on the last day." This is gospel; now listen to the faith of the patriarch Job commemorated in the Old Testament: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that on the last day I shall rise again from earth: and in my flesh I shall see God my Savior. I shall see Him my very self and not as if I were another person: and I shall look upon Him with these same eyes of mine."

The Catholic teaching about the body's resurrection from the grave on the last day, founded upon divine revelation and implied in the quoted words of Jesus Christ, is this, that our bodies shall rise again from the tomb by virtue of the Blessed Eucharist. There is no doubt, therefore, as to the resurrection and its efficient cause. The thought that, though our dear ones have descended into the horrid stillness of the grave where we ourselves shall one day join them, we nevertheless may see them face to face with the very same eyes and clothed in the selfsame bodies we saw upon earth, should be an inducement to frequently, and even daily, eat the Body and drink the Blood of Jesus Christ, and thus multiply and accumulate our hopes of seeing God our Savior with glorified eyes of flesh in heaven, and of there sitting down with our friends once and forever to the everlasting banquet prepared from all eternity for the true and faithful lovers of Christ the Lord.

PONTIFICAL DECREE

Decree on Receiving Daily the Most Holy Eucharist

The Council of Trent, having in view the unspeakable treasures of grace which are offered to the Faithful who receive the Most Holy Eucharist, makes the following declaration: "The holy Synod would desire that at every Mass the Faithful who are present should communicate not only spiritually, by way of internal affection, but sacramentally by the actual reception of the Eucharist" (Sess. 22, cap. 6). These words declare plainly enough the wish of the Church that all Christians should be daily nourished by this heavenly banquet, and should derive therefrom abundant fruit for their sanctification.

This wish of the Council is in entire agreement with that desire wherewith Christ Our Lord was inflamed when He instituted this divine Sacrament. For He Himself more than once, and in no ambiguous terms, pointed out the necessity of eating His Flesh and drinking His Blood, especially in these words: "This is the bread that cometh down from heaven; not as your fathers did eat manna and are dead: he that eateth this bread shall live forever" (John vi. 59). Now, from this comparison of the food of angels with bread and with the manna, it was easily to be understood by His disciples that, as the body is daily nourished with bread, and as the Hebrews were daily nourished with manna in the desert, so the Christian soul might daily partake of this Heavenly Bread and be refreshed thereby. Moreover, whereas, in the Lord's Prayer, we are bidden to ask for "our daily bread," the holy Fathers of the Church all but unanimately teach that by these words must be understood, not so much that material bread which is the support of the body, as the Eucharistic Bread which ought to be our daily food.

Moreover, the desire of Jesus Christ and of the Church

that all the Faithful should daily approach the Sacred Banquet is directed chiefly to this end, that the Faithful, being united to God by means of the Sacrament, may thence derive strength to resist their sensual passions, to cleanse themselves from the stains of daily faults, and to avoid those graver sins to which human frailty is liable; so that its primary purpose is not that the honor and reverence due to Our Lord may be safeguarded, or that the Sacrament may serve as a reward of virtue bestowed on the recipients (St. Augustine, *Serm. 57 in Matth, de Orat. Dom.*, n. 7). Hence the holy Council of Trent calls the Eucharist "the antidote whereby we are delivered from daily faults, and preserved from deadly sins." (Sess. 13, cap. 2.)

This desire on the part of God was so well understood by the first Christians, that they daily flocked to the Holy Table as to a source of life and strength.

"They were persevering in the doctrine of the Apostles, and in the communication of the breaking of bread" (Acts ii. 42). And that this practice was to continue into later ages, not without great fruit of holiness and perfection, the holy Fathers and ecclesiastical writers bear witness.

But when in later times piety grew cold, and more especially under the influence of the plague of Jansenism, disputes began to arise concerning the dispositions with which it was proper to receive Communion frequently or daily, and writers vied with one another in imposing more and more stringent conditions as necessary to be fulfilled. The result of such disputes was that very few were considered worthy to communicate daily, and to derive from this most healing Sacrament its more abundant fruits; the rest being content to partake of It once a year, or once a month, or at the utmost weekly. Nay, to such a pitch was rigorism carried, that whole classes of persons were excluded from a frequent approach to the Holy Table; for instance, those engaged in trade, or even *those living in the state of matrimony.*

Others, however, went to the opposite extreme. Under the persuasion that daily Communion was a divine precept, and in order that no day might pass without the reception of the Sacrament, besides other practices contrary to the approved usage of the Church, they held that the Holy Eucharist ought to be received, and in fact administered It, even on Good Friday.

Under these circumstances the Holy See did not fail in its duty of vigilance. For, by a Decree of this Sacred Congregation, which begins with the words *Cum ad aures*, issued on February 12, 1679, with the approbation of Innocent VI, it condemned these errors, and put a stop to such abuses; at the same time declaring that all the Faithful of whatsoever class, merchants or tradesmen or married persons not excepted, might be admitted to frequent Communion, according to the devotion of each one and the judgment of his confessor. And on the 7th December, 1690, by a Decree of Pope Alexander VIII, *Sanctissimus Dominus*, the proposition of Baius, postulating a perfectly pure love of God, without any admixture of defect, as requisite on the part of those who wished to approach the Holy Table, was condemned.

Yet the poison of Jansenism, which, under the pretext of showing due honor and reverence to the Holy Eucharist, had infected the minds even of good men, did not entirely disappear. The controversy as to the dispositions requisite for the lawful and laudable frequentation of the Sacrament survived the declarations of the Holy See; so much so, indeed, that certain theologians of good repute judged that daily Communion should be allowed to the Faithful only in rare cases, and under many conditions.

On the other hand, there were not wanting men of learning and piety who more readily granted permission for this practice, so salutary and so pleasing to God. In accordance with the teachings of the Fathers, they maintained that there

was no precept of the Church which prescribed more perfect dispositions in the case of daily than of weekly or monthly Communion, while the good effects of daily Communion would, they alleged, be far more abundant than those of Communion received weekly or monthly.

In our own day the controversy has been carried on with increased warmth, and not without bitterness so that the minds of confessors and the consciences of the Faithful have been disturbed, to the no small detriment of Christian piety and devotion. Accordingly, certain distinguished men, themselves pastors of souls, have urgently besought His Holiness, Pope Pius X, to deign to settle, by his supreme authority, the questions concerning the dispositions requisite for daily Communion; so that this usage, so salutary and so pleasing to God, might not only suffer no decrease among the Faithful, but might rather be promoted and everywhere propagated: a thing most desirable in these days, when religion and the Catholic Faith are attacked on all sides, and the true love of God and genuine piety are so lacking in many quarters. And His Holiness, being most earnestly desirous, out of his abundant solicitude and zeal, that the Faithful should be invited to partake of the Sacred Banquet as often as possible, and even daily, and should profit to the utmost by Its fruits, committed the aforèsaid question to this Sacred Congregation, to be looked into and decided once for all (*definiendum*).

Accordingly, the Sacred Congregation of the Council, in a Plenary Session held on December 16, 1905, submitted the whole matter to a very careful scrutiny; and, after sedulously examining the reasons adduced on either side, determined and declared as follows:

1. Frequent and daily Communion, as a thing most earnestly desired by Christ Our Lord, and by the Catholic Church, should be open to all the Faithful, of whatever rank and condition of life; so that no one who is in the state of

grace, and who approaches the Holy Table with a right and devout intention, can lawfully be hindered therefrom.

2. A right intention consists in this: that he who approaches the Holy Table should do so, not out of routine, or vainglory, or human respect, but for the purpose of pleasing God, or being more closely united with Him by charity, and of seeking this divine remedy for his weaknesses and defects.

3. Although it is more expedient that those who communicate frequently or daily should be free from venial sins, especially from such as are fully deliberate, and from any affection thereto, nevertheless it is sufficient that they be free from mortal sin, with the purpose of never sinning mortally in future; and, if they have this sincere purpose, it is impossible but that daily communicants should gradually emancipate themselves from even venial sins, and from all affection thereto.

4. But whereas the Sacraments of the New Law, though they take effect *ex opere operato*, nevertheless produce a greater effect in proportion as the dispositions of the recipient are better; therefore, care is to be taken that Holy Communion be preceded by serious preparation, and followed by a suitable thanksgiving according to each one's strength, circumstances, and duties.

5. That the practice of frequent and daily Communion may be carried out with greater prudence and more abundant merit, the confessor's advice should be asked. Confessors, however, are to be careful not to dissuade any one (*ne quemquam avertant*) from frequent and daily Communion, provided that he is in a state of grace and approaches with a right intention.

6. But since it is plain that, by the frequent or daily reception of the Holy Eucharist, union with Christ is fostered, the spiritual life more abundantly sustained, the soul more richly endowed with virtues, and an even surer pledge

of everlasting happiness bestowed on the recipient, therefore parish priests, confessors, and preachers—in accordance with the approved teaching of the Roman Catechism (Part ii, cap. 4, n. 63)—are frequently, and with great zeal, to exhort the faithful to this devout and salutary practice.

7. Frequent and daily Communion is to be promoted especially in Religious Orders and Congregations of all kinds; with regard to which, however, the Decree *Quemadmodum*, issued on December 17, 1890, by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars is to remain in force. It is also to be promoted especially in ecclesiastical seminaries, where students are preparing for the service of the altar; as also in all Christian establishments, of whatever kind, for the training of youth.

8. In the case of religious institutes, whether of solemn or simple vows, in whose rules, or constitutions, or calendars, Communion is assigned to certain fixed days, such regulations are to be regarded as *directive*, and not *preceptive*. In such cases the appointed number of Communions should be regarded as a minimum, and not as setting a limit to the devotion of the religious. Therefore, freedom of access to the Eucharistic Table, whether more frequently or daily, must always be allowed them, according to the principles above laid down in this Decree. And in order that all religious of both sexes may clearly understand the provisions of this Decree, the Superior of each house is to see that it is read in community in the vernacular, every year within the octave of the Feast of Corpus Christi.

9. Finally, after the publication of this Decree, all ecclesiastical writers are to cease from contentious controversies concerning the dispositions requisite for frequent and daily Communion.

All this having been reported to His Holiness, Pope Pius X, by the undersigned Secretary of the Sacred Congregation, in an audience held on December 17, 1905, His Holiness

ratified and confirmed the present Decree and ordered it to be published, anything to the contrary notwithstanding. He further ordered that it should be sent to all local ordinaries and regular prelates, to be communicated by them to their respective seminaries, parishes, religious institutes and priests; and that in their reports concerning the state of their respective dioceses or institutes, they should inform the Holy See concerning the execution of the matters therein determined.

Given at Rome, the 20th day of December, 1905.

✠ VINCENT,

Card. Bishop of Praenestina, Prefect.

CAJETAN DE LAI,
Secretary.

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401 West 59th Street

New York 19, N. Y.