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HOLY COMMUNION

By MONSIGNOR de SÉGUR



THE PAULIST PRESS

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APPROBATION BY ROME.

Some respectable clergymen having expressed fears as to the doctrine of this little work, and as to rules of piety which appeared to them too lax and too easy, Monsignor de Ségur, having it at heart to dissipate all doubts, submitted his work to the most solemn of all doctrinal approbations, that of Rome. The Very Rev. F. Gigli, Master of the Sacred Palace, and, as such, charged by the Sovereign Pontiff with the examination of books, has, after having carefully perused this little treatise on *Holy Communion*, approved it according to canonical rules. This approbation is complete evidence as to the soundness of the principles offered to the faithful in these few pages.


REIMPRIMATUR

FR. HIREONYMUS GIGLI,
Sacri Palatii Apostolici Magister.

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Decidified

A True Idea of Holy Communion

UR Lord is truly and wholly present in the Blessed Eucharist. This is of Catholic faith, and has always been believed and revered by all Christians. His most holy Body, glorified and heavenly, manifests itself to us under the appearance of the Host, dwells forever on our altars, to be the centre of divine worship, and to bring to our soul, by Communion, strength to persevere in our union with God.

Communion, properly speaking, is not destined to bring us into relation with Jesus Christ. We possess Him already; He is in us, as the Holy Scriptures teach us in almost every page. Nor is it the purpose of Holy Communion to give us the life of grace, viz., spiritual life, which results from our union with God. To be able to receive Communion, it is necessary to live already of that life, to be united with Jesus by grace; otherwise to receive Him would be a sacrilege. What is then the true end, the true object of Communion? To *maintain* the sanctifying and vivifying union of our souls with God; to *keep up* within us spiritual and interior life, to prevent us from fainting in the voyage and combat of life, and from losing the sanctity which God has imparted to us in Baptism and Confirmation.

The special grace of the Sacrament of the Eucharist is therefore a grace of *nourishment* and *perseverance*. Hence our Lord, speaking of the Eucharist, declares **that we can live a Christian life only through Communion.**

“Amen, amen, I say unto you, except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood you shall not have life in you.”¹ To be a Christian, to remain united with God, we must have recourse to Communion. It is with the soul as with the body. We cannot live without eating; food does not give, but supports, life, and imparts to it the vigor which we call health. In this the body is but the symbol of the soul. The soul has also its life, which results from its union with God through Jesus Christ. This union is called grace; it needs food to subsist, and its food is Jesus in the Eucharist; Jesus, Who has said: “I am the bread of life. My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in Me and I in him.”² The soul can no more persevere in grace without Communion than the body in life without food. The strength and health of the body depend on its food; in the same way the sanctity and vigor of the soul depend on Holy Communion. Communion, understand it well, is not a *reward* of acquired sanctity; it is a *means* to reach sanctity, and it is never anything else than a means. Bodily nourishment has the same character. We do not eat because we are strong, but to remain or become strong. And just as it is the nature of physical nourishment to be of frequent and habitual use for the life of the body, so it is also of the nature of Holy Communion to be of ordinary and habitual use in the life of a Christian.

Such is the true idea which the Catholic Church gives us of the Blessed Eucharist. Hence the Council of Trent, invoking the testimony of all Christian ages and of all the Fathers of the Church, formally expresses the

¹John vi. 54.

²John vi. 48, 56. 57.

wish to see all the faithful daily communicating sacramentally at Mass, not being satisfied with spiritual communion, in order to reap more abundantly of the fruits of the most Holy Sacrifice.³ Such is the truth, such is the will of God, such is the rule which He gives us through the infallible voice of the Church. Let each one impress himself with this truth and let him, if need be, reform his private opinion by this judgment, which can never err.

It is true that to receive Communion worthily, a certain degree of sanctity is required. But what is this sanctity? Is it the perfection of great saints and martyrs? By no means. The sanctity which is *required* to receive frequently is within your reach and within the reach of all Christians, wherever they may be. It is simply the state of grace with a sincere will of avoiding sin and serving God faithfully. Is not this disposition very elementary, and do you not feel that God asks it of you? He so truly asks it of you that, without it, no one can be a true Christian. Tell me, what sort of Christian is he who remains in the state of mortal sin and delights in evil?

For a worthy Communion, then, our Lord only asks of you to be truly a Christian, and to be actuated towards Him by a sincere *good will*. Have you this will? Let your conscience answer. If you have it not, you must acquire it; for otherwise hell will be your lot; if you have it, why not receive Communion to strengthen and increase it? It is the clear and unanswerable argu-

³"*Optaret quidem sacrosancta Synodus, ut in singulis missis fideles adstantes, non solum spirituali affectu, sed sacramentali etiam Eucharistiæ perceptione communicarent, quo ad eos sanctissimi hujus sacrificii fructus uberius proveniret.*" Concil. Trid., Sess. xxii., c. vi.

ment which was of old addressed to the faithful of Constantinople by their great Archbishop and Doctor, St. John Chrysostom. "Either," he would say, "you are in the grace of God, or not; if you are, why not receive Communion, which is established to keep you in it? If you are in a state of sin, why not purify your soul by a good confession and then approach the holy table, where you will receive the strength not to fall again."

If you wait to be worthy to approach God, no one would ever receive. "For," says St. Ambrose, "if one is not worthy to receive every day, shall he be worthy to receive after a year?"⁴ The more you keep away from Jesus Christ, the more you become unworthy of approaching Him. Your faults increase in proportion as you keep away from the Sacraments, since you deprive yourself of that Bread of life which St. Ignatius of Antioch used to propose to the faithful of the first century as "the antidote against sin and the preservation of immortality."

Leave aside, then, this false humility; the Church is well aware of your not being worthy to receive, and yet she invites you to receive often, very often. She knows so well that neither you nor anybody else is worthy, that she obliges all her children, all her ministers, even her bishops, to say before receiving Communion, not once but thrice, and from the bottom of their hearts: "*Domine non sum dignus ut intres sub tectum meum*—Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof." The Church does not make you receive because you are worthy of Communion, but because you need it in order to be as little as possible unworthy of your most holy and indulgent Master. She invites you to receive

⁴*Lib. de Sacramentis.*

frequently, not because you are holy, but that you may become so; not because you are strong, but because you are weak and imperfect, inclined to evil, easily seduced and led to sin.

The *dread* of God is not a virtue; the perfection of piety is *love*. Now love casts out fear, because he who fears suffers, and loses that peace of God which surpasses all sentiment and keeps our understanding and our heart in Jesus Christ. The dread of God is a false and dangerous piety, which contracts the heart, banishes from it love and confidence, and leaves souls in dryness, vagueness and despair. True humility is never separated from confidence. A pious Doctor of the fourth century, asking himself which of the two is more humble, he that receives frequently or he that receives seldom, answers unhesitatingly: The more humble is the one who receives Jesus Christ often; for it is a sign that he knows better his misery and feels more the necessity of remedying it.

Confidence, then; go to Jesus because He loves you, however unworthy you be of His love; go to Him with humble and unpretending affection, and pay more attention to the love of God than to your own miseries. The oftener you receive, the more you will become worthy of receiving.

Possibly Holy Communion produces no effect on your imagination and on your nerves, but it is not so with your will. I speak from experience, as the daily witness of the wonderful and admirable changes brought about by frequent Communion in well-disposed hearts. It is certain that if you seek in Communion sensible sweetness and devotion, you may perhaps see it diminish in proportion as you receive more frequently. But it is not sensible devotion, nor tears, nor emotions, which you must **seek**

in Communion; when God gives them, you must thank Him as a child thanks his mother for the delicacies which she gives him after meals; but just as the dessert is rather unsubstantial, and is never more than an accessory part of the dinner, in the same way, in piety and Communion, which is the chief act of piety, we must aim at what is substantial, viz., at the increase of Christian virtues, humility, meekness, self-denial, detachment, charity, and pay but little attention to sensible consolations which, after all, are but spiritual dainties.

“Do not allow yourself,” says St. Alphonsus, “to be deceived by the thought that if you receive Communion less often you will experience more devotion. Indeed, he who eats but seldom, eats with greater appetite; but he is far from being as strong as he who takes his regular meals. If you receive but seldom, you will perhaps have a little more sensible devotion, but you will not profit so much by Communion, because your soul will lack strength to avoid many faults.” Do not think much then of a little more sensible fervor, but consider piety from a higher standpoint. Seek in Communion the true, practical love of Jesus, and you shall always find it. When you receive in order to be stronger against temptations, to be more chaste, more inclined to prayer, more courageous in the combats of every day, be assured that you shall derive much fruit from Communion, and the more frequently you receive, the greater also shall be the effect.

The fear of too great familiarity with holy things may be good, but it may also be bad. If by *familiarity* you mean negligence and routine, you are quite right. Routine is to habit what abuse is to use. We must use good things but not abuse them. The dread, however, of the abuse must not prevent the use. Otherwise we could no

danger do anything; for there can be abuse in everything. Guard then with care against routine in the service of God. But if by familiarity you mean intimacy, habitual union, tender and unreserved confidence, you would be very wrong to close your heart against a sentiment so truly Christian.

Who respected our Lord more than the saints? And yet did they not all love Him with the most tender and familiar affection? and, among the Christians of our own acquaintance, who have the greater respect for God and His law? Are they not those who are more assiduous in their religious practices? Not only must you not be afraid to familiarize yourself with Jesus Christ to make His reception in Communion a *habit*, but you must seek to form this holy habit. Good habits are as desirable as bad ones are dangerous. We may say that a man is a true and thorough Christian, only when the service of God has become for him a habit, viz., a second nature; now, Holy Communion is the centre of this divine service. "A day without Mass and without Communion is to me like soup without salt," said to me, one day, an excellent servant of God, a convert from Protestantism. Accustom yourself to receive and to receive well, and for this purpose receive often. "We do well," says St. Francis of Sales, "only what we do often, and the best workmen are those that practise most."

The Church urges you to receive often, and even, if possible, every day, but she does not oblige you to go to confession for every Communion. There is but one case, according to the Council of Trent, when we are *obliged* to confess before Communion: "When we know that we are guilty of a mortal sin."⁶

⁶*Conc. Trid.* Sess. xiii., c. vi.

Now, Christian souls that often approach the Sacraments seldom fall into mortal sin. As to those less grievous faults, which are called venial, and which are common to human weakness, faith teaches us positively that we can fully efface them by a sincere act of the love of God and by repentance; and to render this remission of sin still more easy, the Church has established, under the name of *Sacramentals*, most simple means of purifying our consciences; such are, among others, the sign of the cross with holy water, the recitation of the *Our Father*, of the *Confiteor*, etc.

You who hesitate to receive Communion on account of some venial sins committed since your last confession, listen to the Council of Trent, that great voice of the Catholic Church, declaring that "Holy Communion preserves from mortal sins and effaces *venial sins*."⁶

Understand this well. It is not confession but Communion that has been established to blot out daily faults. It consumes them as fire consumes straw; fire does not consume stones nor iron; mortal sins are as stones and iron, and can only be crushed by the hammer of confession; straw represents those lighter faults which, alas! we commit daily, however sincere be our good will. Receive Communion without fear and with joy. Rest assured that you shall never annoy our good Lord by frequent, even daily, Communion.

Of course we must not only prepare ourselves for Communion, but we must prepare with the greatest care, and after having prepared ourselves well, and very well, we must humble ourselves before God, and beg Him to make up what is wanting in us. But in what should this

⁶"*Antidotum quo liberemur a culpis quotidianis et a peccatis mortalibus præservedemur.*" *Conc. Trid.*, Sess. xiii., c. 2.

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preparation consist? Must we, as a preparation for Communion, make long meditations and multiply exercises of piety? Not at all; this is very good, no doubt, and very useful when we can afford time; but few persons can spare it for that purpose. The Church which exhorts us all, whatsoever our condition may be, to the frequent reception of Communion, is the first to say that we must, before all, fulfill the duties of our state of life. What must we do then to prepare worthily for Communion? We must lead a Christian life, viz., be careful about our prayers, often think of our Lord, and remain interiorly united with Him, watch over our natural dispositions, in order to avoid even slight faults, seriously apply ourselves to the fulfillment of all our duties, in order to please God and exercise ourselves in humility and meekness. The true preparation for Communion is the manner in which we live; as the proper thanksgiving is the manner in which we spend the day after having received our Lord.

What can prevent such preparation? Do you need much time to think of our Lord and to love Him, to be chaste and kind and to sanctify your ordinary actions by intentions worthy of a Christian? No more time is required to be good than to be bad, to live for Jesus Christ than to live for self. If you lead a good and holy life, you shall always be fully prepared for Communion. St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi was one morning engaged in baking bread for the community when she heard the bell that called the sisters to Communion. She was offering her labor to the Lord, and her heart was at the foot of the tabernacle; she made no other preparation, but, burning with love, and without noticing the dough that adhered to her hands, she went to the chapel to receive her Jesus. "Offer to God all that you do," she

used to say to the religious of Mount Carmel, of whom she was prioress; "perform all your actions in order to please Him, and then you may approach the holy table without fear." "Thus," adds St. Alphonsus, "when you shall have had but little time to prepare, owing to some good work or duty of your state, do not for that reason stay away from Communion. Be careful only to avoid useless conversation, and all occupations which admit of delay." The holy St. Francis of Sales completes these wise counsels by tracing in his *Introduction* the line of conduct which it would be very desirable that every one should follow. "On the evening preceding your Communion," he recommends, "retire early, as much as possible, in order to recollect yourself and pray in peace. In the morning as you awake, think at once of your good Saviour, Who is waiting for you. On going to Church, offer your Communion to the Blessed Virgin, and afterwards receive Him with love Who gives Himself to you through love." Be convinced that in this matter we can do all we wish, and that we can always find time to prepare and to receive if we truly desire it. How many I have known, persons of every age and condition, for whom it seemed to be a material impossibility to receive often, who nevertheless found in their fervor the means of satisfying their piety!

When St. Peter knew by the miraculous draught the divine sanctity and majesty of Him Who had entered his boat, he threw himself at the feet of Jesus and said: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." And the kind Master answered: "Fear not." Nor must you be afraid; your heart is for God, and you wish to serve Him faithfully. He does not ask more of you. Your

⁷Luke v. 8.

distractions must humble you, not discourage you; **for** the most part, be sure of it, they are not willful, and **do** not deprive you of the fruit of your Communion. There is a good Communion wherever there is a good will. Dryness, disgust, privation of sensible consolation, worrying distractions, the saints have suffered as well as you. St. Vincent de Paul remained for two years in such a state of spiritual aridity that he could not even recite an act of faith; and as the devil took advantage of his state of anguish to trouble him by violent temptations, the poor saint placed on his heart the *Credo*, which he had written for that purpose and sewed in his cassock, and agreed with our Lord, once for all, that whenever he would touch that paper with his hand, it would be an equivalent of the acts of piety which he could no longer perform. Unshaken in his faith, he continued his spiritual exercises, celebrating Mass every day. Were his Communions good, I ask you? Fénelon spent the last years of his life in somewhat similar trials, and used to write to his pious friend, the Duke of Beauvillers: "I am in great aridity and in trying peace."

It is by such trials that our Lord generally purifies His true servants. For souls in such a state of desolation, there is not, according to St. Teresa, a better remedy than frequent Communion. Besides, the Blessed Sacrament often works in the soul unperceived changes, as St. Lawrence Justinian remarks. The great Doctor, St. Bonaventure, says also: "Although you should feel yourself tepid and without devotion, you must not, however, keep away from the holy table; for the more you are sick, the more you need the physician."⁸ A holy priest also said one day to me: "I am less afraid of an im-

⁸S. Bonav. de *Perfect. Relig.*, c. 21.

perfect Communion than of no Communion; sickness is better than death."

The Eucharist is the source of divine love; the colder you feel, the nearer you draw to the source of heat. Perhaps that dryness which makes you uneasy comes from a contraction of the heart and from rather too selfish a piety. In your Communion and in your prayers in general, do you think more of others than of yourself? Charity will bring you good fortune; your heart will expand when you think more of the salvation of your brethren, of the conversion of the wicked, and of the interest of the true Faith. In praying for others you will have sentiments and attention such as you have not when you think only of yourself. It is to be remarked, finally, that this disgust is almost always a temptation. The devil being unable to attack you directly, revenges himself by harassing and teasing you. Be more cunning than he; he wishes to discourage you and to try your patience; stand firm; the time of consolation will soon come.

If you feel weak even when you take your ordinary food, what would happen if you ate nothing or next to nothing? Instead of being weak, you would be starved outright. If you give up the Bread of the strong, you will increase your weakness tenfold, and you will no longer lament, as you do now, over venial faults but over grievous faults—mortal sins. "I sin daily," says St. Ambrose, quoted by St. Thomas Aquinas, "I sin daily—daily do I, therefore, need a remedy."⁹ That is what the Blessed Virgin made St. Frances of Rome understand one day when the latter felt uneasy at the little progress she seemed to make after receiving Communion. "My child," she said, with tender affection, "the faults which

⁹*Summ.*, iii. part., c. 80, art. 10.

you commit must not keep you away from the holy table; they should, on the contrary, lead you oftener to it, since you find in the most Holy Sacrament of the altar the remedy for all your miseries.”

Communion, even daily Communion,¹⁰ though it preserves us from grievous sins, does not make us *impeccable*. As long as we shall be in this world we shall sin, and the best among us are, in truth, but the least wicked. Let us be patient and bear with ourselves, since Jesus bears with us. Thus acted the saints; thus acted the first Christians. They received every day and still were as fallible as we. It is a great error to think that they were all saints. The writings of the Apostles and the documents that have come to us from the early days of the Church contain abundant proofs to the contrary. There is not one of the Epistles of St. Paul in which he does not reproach many of them with their dissensions, their inconstancy, their ingratitude and negligences; he speaks of the Christians of Rome as having *all* forsaken him through fear of persecution. St. Cyprian complains bitterly of their tepidity and even of their scandals, which were the seed of numberless apostasies in the time of danger. St. Austin, and others besides, bear witness to the same failings. The first Christians, therefore, were far from being all saints, and yet, I repeat it, they used to receive every day. We learn from the Pope, St. Anacletus, the third successor of St. Peter, that this rule has come directly from the Apostles. And that such was the doctrine of the holy Roman Church.¹¹

¹⁰It is hardly necessary to add that the devotion of frequent, and even daily Communion, recommended by Pope Benedict XIV., was confirmed and enforced by the late Pope Pius X.

¹¹*Const. Apost. Summ.*, iii. part. c. 8. art. 10.

Daily Communion did not make them impeccable, but greatly helped them in the way of sanctity, saved them from many grievous faults, and adorned many of them with incomparable virtues. It will be the same with you. Though not making you perfect, Communion will diminish your faults little by little, and make you grow imperceptibly in piety and wisdom. Be not astonished that this transformation does not take place in a day; how many years does it take for a child to become a man? Is he seen growing? Still he grows every day; it is a hidden but real action to which each of his meals contributes. Moreover, do not be astonished because you relapse into the same faults. Piety and Communion, though they weaken our evil propensities, do not at once destroy them—the germ of a predominant passion is very hard to eradicate. The devil constantly avails himself of this germ and weak side of our nature; this is the source of all our relapses—alas! so frequent—which tire and humble Christians, but which should not deject them.

If your conscience can bear you testimony that you have no affection for sin, that you wish to serve Jesus Christ faithfully, be not troubled by your daily faults; Communion will purify your soul from them, as we said before, when stating the formal teaching of the Council of Trent.

You say you fear by receiving frequently to scandalize persons who know you? If you mean those half Christians, that crowd of persons who understand nothing of the things of God, although they observe some practices of religion, let them talk; their blame is almost praise. If you mean, on the contrary, pious persons, be sure, you will never scandalize them, nor even astonish them, if you

live like a true Christian. Do you know what scandalizes in one that receives often? It is not his Communion, but his negligence, notwithstanding his frequent Communion, in checking his evil dispositions and in making his life tally with his religious practices; it is his acts of impatience, his uncharitableness, his gluttony, the too minute care of his health and comfort, and all those numberless faults which are more than imperfections, and cannot escape the notice of a conscience in any degree anxious about its own sanctification. If, which God forbid, you are guilty in this respect, you ought at once efficaciously to remedy this most real evil. You should not give up Communion, but stir yourself up in order to lead a life more holy and more worthy of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

There are, I know, even among good Christians, persons so little enlightened that they are scandalized at mere trifles. Though we must be careful not to offend them, yet we must not pay much attention to their censure. Do what you please, you will never satisfy everybody. Seek to please our Lord, ever mean well and aim at what is right; gather with humility the various judgments which good people pass on your conduct, and, if you can, profit by them for your own amendment. In your doubts, apply with simplicity to some priest enlightened in the ways of God and abide by his decisions. Such was the opinion of the learned and pious Fénelon, who so earnestly recommended frequent Communion. "We must accustom ourselves," he used to say, "to see Christians who commit venial sins in spite of their sincere desire of not committing any, and who yet receive with fruit every day. We must not be so far shocked by the imperfections which God leaves them for their humiliation, as to

lose sight of greater and more dangerous faults from which this daily remedy preserves them. Why be scandalized, when we see laymen who, better to get rid of their imperfections and overcome the temptations of a corrupt world, wish to feed on the Body of Christ? Allow yourself to be judged, not by grumblers, who are ever ready to be scandalized and find fault with everything, but by an experienced director, who may guide you *according to the spirit of the Church.*" In conclusion, watch carefully over yourself; be on your guard against scruples no less than against relaxation. Daily renew your good resolutions, and mind as little as possible what is said about you.

Filial obedience and family duties are, no doubt, sacred and holy, provided the family busies itself only with what concerns it. Even in what concerns the service of God, we are to yield somewhat to exigencies of relatives. But there is a limit which all must respect. The reception of the Sacraments, more than anything else, must be independent of the control of the family, which should leave this important and delicate question of conscience to the judgment of the Church and of her ministers.

Holy Communion is the source of all grace, mildness and goodness. If you receive often and well, you will become better in a short time; your family will be the first to notice it, and also the first to gain by it; this will make them unwilling to throw any obstacle in your way. Be prudent and firm, and you will not fail to find the means of frequenting the Sacraments without inconvenience to any one. But if, in spite of your precautions and condescension, the members of your family still find fault with your piety, go on quietly, pretending not to notice it. Their prejudices will, no doubt, soon die away,

or, at least, they will get accustomed to see you receive, as we get accustomed to anything that is unpleasant. Who knows but our Lord will reward your constancy by drawing to His love the very persons who endeavor to draw you away from it?

Do you know pious persons who do not receive frequently? I do not. On the other hand, I hardly know any one receiving often who is not truly pious, in the full sense of the word. For we cannot call pious such persons as simply lead a regular life. Regularity is not piety. For a *regular* life, it suffices to observe to the letter the laws of God and of the Church, to go to Mass on Sundays and holydays, to respect religion and live uprightly. To be *pious*, you must go higher and live more in the love of Jesus Christ. When once in the ways of piety, the Christian is no longer satisfied with the bare observance of precepts; he endeavors besides to put in practice the evangelical counsels, denial of self, interior recollection, the zeal of souls, and all that beautiful group of virtues which constitute Christian sanctity. He acts from love more than from duty, and considers the service of God not as a heavy yoke, but as tender and filial devotedness. Tell me, do you know many animated with such sentiments of true piety who seldom approach the Holy Eucharist? It would be the first time that effects would be seen without a cause, since the Church holds forth to us Communion as the essential act of piety. Experience shows it. It is no more possible to be pious without frequent Communion than it is to have a vigorous and flourishing health without good food.

The confessor, or, to speak more correctly, *the spiritual director*, is the priest who guides and counsels us in the way of Christian perfection. We are not obliged to take

a director, but nothing is wiser and more according to Catholic practice than to allow ourselves to be guided in the path of piety by a holy and experienced priest. Nothing is wiser, when we have chosen a good spiritual director, than to follow his advice with docility, and abide by his decisions, especially in a practice so important as that of frequent, and still more of daily Communion. All Catholic Doctors agree on this point. No one is a good judge in his own cause. Therefore, if you wish to serve God with all your heart, choose with the greatest care the priest who is to direct you. "Choose him among ten thousand," says St. Francis of Sales. On this choice depends, in a great measure, your progress in the love of God. A priest may be a good priest and not be a good director; this divine ministry, which St. Gregory the Great calls *the art of arts*, requires special knowledge, consummate experience, and many natural and supernatural qualities which we can not expect to find in the majority. Chose for your director a priest whom you shall deem to possess, in a superior degree, the following qualities: great love for the Sovereign Pontiff and for the Church; profound respect for ecclesiastical authority; tender devotion towards the Blessed Sacrament and the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God; tender and indulgent charity towards sinners, the poor, and the lowly; a sound and unpretending mind; a firm character; a good heart; a life edifying, austere, and truly sacerdotal. When, through the blessing of God, you shall have found so sure and faithful a guide, abandon yourself, without fear, to his guidance; he will make you run in the way of the commandments and of the counsels.¹²

¹²If you have not such a director within your reach, it will be

All saintly priests, imbued with the true spirit of the Church, are in favor of frequent Communion, and in this they only apply a general rule, formally traced out by the Church itself. For, indeed, we are not free as regards the principle of Communion; we have, on this subject, precise rules which we are bound to follow in the direction of souls, and which we cannot set aside without being guilty of a serious breach of duty. The Church has summed up these rules in the celebrated catechism known as The Catechism of Trent, and published by order of the Council of Trent, under the direction of Pope St. Pius V. Now the Catechism of the Council of Trent declares that pastors are bound in conscience to exhort their flock to frequent and even to daily Communion, the soul needing, as well as the body, its daily nourishment;¹³ and it adds that such is the doctrine of the Fathers and of the Councils.

“One day,” relates the venerable Louis of Blois, “our Lord complained of those who dissuade others from frequent Communion. ‘My delight,’ He said, ‘is to be with the children of men, it is for them that I have established the Sacrament of the altar, and he that prevents souls from receiving Me diminishes My delight.’” And the venerable Father of Avila, so highly esteemed by St. Francis of Sales and by Teresa, used to say “that those who find fault with frequent Communion, play the part of the devil!, who bears the most intense hatred towards the Blessed Sacrament.” St. Margaret of Cortona had a director who had always greatly exhorted her to frequent

enough to follow the rules traced out by St. Francis of Sales in his admirable *Introduction to a Devout Life*. St. Francis of Sales is the director *par excellence*, especially for Christians living in the world.

¹³*Cat. Rom. ad Par.*, ii. part., c. 12

Communion; when he died, our Lord revealed to her that this good priest received abundant reward in heaven for his charity in facilitating her access to the Blessed Sacrament. We read also in the life of a holy religious, Anthony Torres of the Society of Jesus, that he appeared, immediately after his death, to a saintly person, and told her that his glory had been greatly increased in heaven because he had advised all his penitents to receive Communion frequently. Happy is the priest whose constant aim is to follow, in his ministry, the directions of the Church, and happy are the souls whom God, in His goodness, has blessed with such a guide in the path of life.

Monthly Communion is good, no doubt, but it would be an error to think that it satisfies the wish of the Church and that it is an act of great piety. St. Francis of Sales does not think so; he declares that the longest time between the Communion of a Christian who has any care for his soul should not exceed a month. The *monthly Communion*, established in many confraternities and houses of piety, must be considered, not as a *maximum*, but as a *minimum*. We must follow the rules in the spirit which inspired them, a spirit of Catholic piety which, though it desires, with the Church, far more frequent Communion, yet thought it proper to fix an extreme limit for souls of little piety. The meaning of these laudable customs and regulations must be determined by the great rule which is above all others—the teaching, I mean, of the Church and of the Holy See.

As a practical rule, I know nothing more sensible and more simple than what St. Thomas says on Holy Communion. After having exposed the Catholic doctrine on daily Communion, relying on the authority of the Fathers and, in particular, on the celebrated words of St. August

time: "It is daily bread, receive it, therefore, daily, that you may profit daily by it," the angelic Doctor adds: "When any one knows by experience that daily Communion increases in his heart the love of God, that his respect for the Blessed Sacrament does not suffer by it, he ought to receive every day."¹⁴ If such be the case, receive every day. If you are satisfied with weekly Communion, you are free to do as you please. It is the *ordinary* Communion of Good Christians; but it is not frequent Communion according to the positive teaching of holy Doctors. They call frequent Communion that only which is made three or four times a week. At all events, do not accustom yourself, as says St. John Chrysostom, "to measure Communion by time; it is the purity of conscience which makes it time to receive." And St. Augustine says: "He that has not the necessary dispositions to receive frequently, has them not to receive once in the year."

What the Catholic Church counsels can be neither exaggerated nor impossible. The Church gives us truth in piety; when we hear her, we hear Jesus Christ; when we despise her counsels, we despise the light of God. It is strange to see Catholics make so little of a divine authority. Be consistent in your belief, and in all its practical consequences. You believe, you know, it is Jesus Who speaks to you through His Church; be not satisfied with simply hearing and approving Him; go the full length, and put His lessons in practice. Let those murmur who do not wish for truth. Let them display what they take to be respect toward the Blessed Sacrament, but which, in reality, is only servile fear, showing little knowledge of the mysteries of Jesus Christ and

¹⁴*Liber Sent.*, lib. iv.

much attachment to private notions. As for you, a child of the Church, walk on peaceably in the path traced out for you by the saints, in the footsteps of the Apostles, the martyrs and all the first Christians; in the footsteps of St. Denis, St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Justin, St. Cyprian, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory Nazianzen, St. John Chrysostom, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Hilary, St. Gregory; in the footsteps of St. Bernard, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Catherine of Genoa, St. Teresa, St. Philip of Neri, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Ignatius, and all the saints of the Society of Jesus; St. Francis of Sales, St. Alphonsus Liguori; in the footsteps of Olier, Fénelon, Bossuet, and so many others who vie with each other in extolling frequent Communion, daily Communion, the true Catholic Communion. Fear neither exaggeration nor error. "Rejoice in the Lord always: again, I say, rejoice,"¹⁵ and, desiring to live for Jesus, nourish yourself with Jesus.

Children, as well as grown-up persons, can and should receive frequently. Our Lord does not ask of them what they cannot give, and knows better than we do that levity which frightens us. But He knows also, and better than we do, that innocence is the most precious of all treasures; that the devil is anxious to rob children of it at an early age, and that Communion alone can protect them against his snares. As we remarked before, one never receives too often when he receives well; and to receive well, it is enough to receive our Saviour with sincere good will. This applies to children as well as to grown-up persons. Experience proves that nothing is more sincere than the good will of a child who has just made his first

¹⁵ Philip. iv. 4.

Communion. He loves Jesus Christ—wishes to possess Him. Why not satisfy his desire? He is often more worthy to receive Him than we who disdain his piety. “Suffer the little children to come to Me,” says our Divine Master, “for of such is the kingdom of God.” The kingdom of God on earth is the Eucharist. “Children are light,” you say. Nothing is more true, and it is for that very reason that we must make them receive often. For a child, a week is a month; at that age impressions succeed each other vividly and rapidly. It is necessary, therefore, often to renew Christian impressions if we intend to prepare for the future men strong in faith. “Children are light.” True, but they are good and affectionate. We must give its proper nourishment to their need of loving; we must make them love Jesus Christ; and for that often bring them into close relation with Him. Their defects, though real, have little consistency, and it is piety which prevents these defects from becoming vices.

The rule should be for a Christian child to receive, from his first Communion, every Sunday and festival day, unless his director, his parents, or his master notice in him an *evident* want of good will, and even then great circumspection should be used in keeping him away from the holy table; for at once the danger of corruption is at hand—that danger which chills a mother’s heart, and which Holy Communion alone wards off efficaciously. Do you wish to preserve your child in his innocence and purity? Encourage him to receive often, or at least do not prevent him from receiving when his director advises him to do so. How many parents, through a misunderstood zeal, are unwittingly the first cause of the ruin of their children! How many have I not known who have

been the direct and fatal cause of that very corruption which they dreaded so much! It is not frequent Communion which you must fear for your child; it is, on the contrary, his negligence to receive—his small desire for the blessed Sacrament. Everything is to be feared for a child who keeps away from God. “But we fear for the future; it is better not to go so fast in the beginning; it is always unpleasant to retrace one’s steps.” Why should these good children retrace their steps? Why should they ever cease to love God? Is not fervor in youth the best pledge of a Christian after-life? If you wish your child to be afterwards strong against evil, allow him even now to draw abundantly from the Source of all strength; allow him to unite himself intimately with the Principle of all fidelity. His present piety will be the earnest of his future piety, and saved innocence will be for you and for him the dawn of a pure adolescence. If, in spite of Holy Communion, it often happens that young people cannot avoid all falls, what will the consequence be if they are deprived of the “Bread that makes virgins?”

In the first ages of the Church children were admitted, as well as grown up persons, to daily Communion. They used to draw from the Sacrament of Jesus Christ that vigorous sap of Christian life, that pure spirit of faith, of prayer and fervor, which has given to the Church saints and martyrs not over ten, twelve, or fifteen years of age. The hand of God has not been shortened. The same means will, in our day, produce the same effects, and Communion given to children will still create in them the germ of sanctity. “We fear, finally,” say some parents, “that our child should become too pious, and at last wish to become a priest, and consecrate himself to

God." Are then piety and vocation the same thing? To dread a vocation is already on the part of Christian parents a very strange disposition, for the consecration of oneself to God is certainly the "best portion," and a blessing for the whole family; but to dread piety is sheer nonsense. Piety is the only real good, the only true happiness. "Piety is profitable to all things, having promise of the life that is now, and of that which is to come." One is never too pious, because he is never too good. How many children are brought to ruin through such foolish notions! Leave then to children that religious freedom which alone can open their hearts, and initiate them in Christian life. We have no more right to restrain it than to force it, especially when there is question of the Sacraments. Let us instruct and direct children; let us carefully guide their inexperience. But our direction must, above all, be wholly Catholic, and must never go so far as to thwart freedom of conscience. We warp souls by such an abuse of authority, and unwittingly cross the designs of God upon them. Therefore, frequent Communion should be for children also. If it be intended to form vigorous generations, let Holy Communion be given to children. The Eucharist alone makes saints.

What I have said of children applies, with still greater force, to young people from sixteen to twenty years of age, in those dreadful years when the struggle against passions is rendered more dangerous from the corrupting examples of the world, and from a thousand exterior difficulties. St. Philip Neri, who devoted his life to the sanctification of the Roman youth, and whose testimony has the double weight of angelic sanctity and of special experience, declared that frequent Communion, together with a tender devotion towards the Blessed Virgin Mary

were, he would not say the best, but the *only* means to preserve a young man in good morals and in a life of faith, to raise him in his falls and strengthen him in his weakness. A student came to him one day, begging him to help him rid himself of evil habits that had kept him enslaved for a long time. The saint consoled him, gave him good counsel, heard the humble avowal of his failings, and dismissed him, absolved and happy, with the recommendation to receive the following day. "If it should happen you," he added, "which God forbid, to fall again, come to see me at once, and trust to God's goodness." The following evening St. Philip saw the same youth coming to his confessional to confess a relapse into the same fault. The good saint encouraged him as he did the first time, told him to struggle manfully, gave him a second absolution, and directed him as before to have recourse to the sacred Body of Christ. The young man, tormented on the one hand by the violence of the bad habit, on the other by his desire of returning to God, drew from this direction, full of mercy, and from his frequent reception of the Eucharist, such a degree of energy, that for thirteen successive days he returned to the saint, whose charity was as persevering as the sorrow of his penitent. Love finally triumphed, and Jesus numbered among His faithful servants a newcomer, who made, in a short time, such rapid progress in sanctity, that St. Philip judged him worthy of the priesthood. Being admitted into the Congregation of the Oratory, he edified Rome by his zeal and his virtues, and died, whilst yet young, the death of the saints. He used to relate with pleasure the history of his conversion, to encourage poor sinners, and make young people understand that frequent Communion is their salvation

Would to God that I also could make them understand it, and have the joy to see them all partake of the sacred Flesh of Jesus Christ! The young man is placed between two extremes: between the fatal love of his rebellious flesh, which dishonors and ruins him, and that of the most holy, most adorable Flesh of the Saviour, which sanctifies and preserves him, and gives him strength to conquer his passions. He must choose; if he rejects this second love, he will be enslaved by the first. At eighteen or twenty, purity is not possible without Communion, much less that energy and all those promising virtues which make a young man what is most charming and most amiable on earth. What wonderful changes would take place in our colleges and public schools if frequent Communion prevailed therein! Instead of that immorality which sickens the heart, instead of that indifference still more baneful than corrupt morals, we would see our young people, naturally so lively, so amiable, and so remarkable by the gifts of the mind and of the heart, giving to the Church and to the country great men, as of old. Everything languishes when away from Christ; nothing can bloom afresh but by His divine contact. Experience shows that such is the influence of Communion on the lives of young persons. There are no vices which cannot be rooted out by a regular reception of the Sacraments—there is no change which it cannot effect.

Whatever you be, then, young people, pure yet or already defiled, come to Holy Communion, which alone can preserve you in grace, or restore you to it. Nothing is more easy than to be chaste with the Eucharist. What is impossible to you without Jesus, will become easy with Him. Think of your future; to be one day a good Christian, you must spend worthily the years

of your youth, which you can only do by frequent recourse to the Eucharist.

Ever and in all circumstances do we need our Lord; but this need is never so pressing as in sorrow, trouble, and suffering. From the depth of the tabernacle the Divine Consoler calls us, saying: "Come to Me all you that labor, and I will refresh you." He alone dries up tears, or at least renders them less painful. When our poor heart is broken by affliction, He alone can restore it to peace, to hope, and to that interior joy wholly supernatural, with which Christians alone are acquainted, and which harmonizes so well with sorrow. A Christian may be in anguish and affliction. He cannot be unhappy. "I weep," calmly said a mother one day who had lost her only child. "I weep, and yet I am contented." She used to receive every day.

In Jesus we find eternity—we find heaven. Let us go to Him when we find our exile too bitter and life too heavy. Let us go to His Sacrament, which makes us forget the earth, and its trials, and its crosses, and its struggles, and its injustice. Jesus Christ will teach us Himself how to suffer with profit to our soul; He will take away our bitterness, and give us in return His peace and His strength. When we are afflicted by sickness, let us have recourse to Him. He is the best of physicians, and His visit will bring, at the same time, relief to our body and joy to our heart. Every Christian in sickness should receive at least once a week, and this from the beginning of his sickness. The physician of the body should be called only after the physician of the soul; earth comes after heaven—time after eternity. These Communions, if you recover, shall make of your days of sufferings days of sanctification, which will have an in-

fluence on your future life; should you not recover, they will prepare you to receive Extreme Unction worthily, and to appear wholly purified by love before the God of your eternity.

Procure the same happiness for your little children when they fall sick. The Church teaches us positively that they can and must receive Communion when they have attained the age of reason, and Pope Benedict XIV. declares that it is sufficient if the child "can distinguish this heavenly nourishment from ordinary food." How fervently do sick children receive! The grace of Baptism acts in them with admirable efficacy, and prepares them better than all our efforts to receive worthily the holy Eucharist.

I advise you, dear reader, with the Church, to receive every day if you live, and wish to live, wholly for God. My intention has been to make you well understand the object and use of the Eucharist; to make you desire daily Communion; to prevent you from blaming those who receive daily, and, finally, to show you that instead of dreading Holy Communion we must all receive it often, and thus comply more and more with the wish of the Church, who offers it to us daily.

Receive; receive often, and as far as your influence extends, encourage everywhere frequent Communion, which our Lord Jesus Christ desires so ardently. Do not mind faultfinders, but act according to your faith. Walk on steadily in the footsteps of the saints. "Receive often, Philothea," says the amiable St. Francis of Sales, "as often as you can according to the advice of your spiritual Father. By often adoring and feeding on beauty, goodness, and purity itself in this divine Sacrament, you also shall become all beautiful, good, and pure."¹⁸

