

Series on the Mass, Part 2

September 8, 2019

Series on the Mass was first published in 2015 and is being repeated at the request of parishioners.

The preparation for Mass should begin before we arrive at the church. The 1987 Code of Canon Law gives the norm of fasting one hour before receiving Holy Communion. This fast requires abstaining from food and drink with the exception only of water and medicine for at least a period of one hour before Holy Communion (cf. Canon 919). Chewing gum, even if not swallowed would constitute breaking the fast since there are flavors and juices in the gum that would be swallowed, thus breaking the fast. The ancient practice used to be fasting from midnight until communion. If someone out of reverence and devotion wishes to keep a longer fast they can of course do so and it is laudable, but a longer fast cannot be imposed on others.

Pope Pius XII gives an explanation of the fast in his 1953 Apostolic Constitution *Christus Dominus*:

From the very earliest time the custom was observed of administering the Eucharist to the faithful who were fasting. Toward the end of the fourth century fasting was prescribed by many Councils for those who were going to celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice. So it was that the Council of Hippo in the year 393 issued this decree: 'The Sacrament of the altar shall be offered only by those who are fasting.' Shortly afterward, in the year 397, the Third Council of Carthage issued this same command, using the very same words. At the beginning of the fifth century this custom can be called quite common and immemorial. Hence St. Augustine affirms that the Holy Eucharist is always received by people who are fasting and likewise that this custom is observed throughout the entire world.

Doubtless this way of doing things was based upon very serious reasons, among which there can be mentioned first of all the one the Apostle of the Gentiles deplores when he is dealing with the brotherly love-feast of the Christians. Abstinence from food and drink is in accord with that supreme reverence we owe to the supreme majesty of Jesus Christ when we are going to receive Him hidden under the veils of the Eucharist. And moreover, when we receive His precious Body and Blood before we take any food, we show clearly that this is the first and loftiest nourishment by which our soul is fed and its holiness increased. Hence the same St. Augustine gives this warning: 'It has pleased the Holy Ghost that, to honor so great a Sacrament, the Lord's Body should enter the mouth of the Christian before other food.'

Not only does the Eucharistic fast pay due honor to our Divine Redeemer, it fosters piety also; and hence it can help to increase in us those most salutary fruits of holiness which Christ, the Source and Author of all good, wishes us who are enriched by His Grace to bring forth.

The requirement of the fast helps us to think of our Lord before we even arrive at the church, and even though the fast is very short today, we should still try to offer sacrifice in preparation for the reception of our Lord Who sacrificed Himself for us. Thus when we approach the church and hear the bells ringing calling us to prayer, we have already been preparing ourselves for a worthy communion.

Sincerely in Christ,

Rev. Charles Van Vliet, FSSP

Pastor, Regina Caeli Parish