

# Take And Eat

By Rev Robert Nash, S.J.

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FROM TIME TO TIME, one hears of men going on a hunger strike and everybody knows what must be the inevitable result if they persist in refusing to take food. Little by little, the body will grow more and more emaciated, each day that the strike lasts sees the man's strength give way, and ultimately death must come, for, through sheer lack of food, all power has been lost to resist its onslaughts.

Now there is another sort of hunger strike with which we propose to deal in the pages of this little book. You will find thousands of Catholics who refuse to give to their souls the food that is essential to the soul's health. Result? Of course, the soul too sickens and dies, for having no powers of resistance it must also succumb to the attacks of the forces of evil. You cannot put a soldier on the field and make no provision for keeping him supplied with food. A starving man must be fed and nourished before he can be expected to fight. In just the same way, your soul cannot long hold out against the many enemies who assail her unless she too is kept fit for the fight by regular supplies of sustaining food.

On every side you will come across people who will explain to you how hard it is to "keep good" at this present time. Undoubtedly, the world of today abounds in temptations of all sorts, and the Catholic who steers through the labyrinth and keeps his course must needs be a skilled pilot. Passion is seething in the human breast and facilities for its gratification abound. What is easier than to allow one's ideals to run crashing into the reef? Who does not feel at times almost overpowered by the temptation to take his hand off the helm and, regardless of consequences, to let his little craft dash recklessly into the vortex of excitement and sin?

Footnote: See "Talking of Temptation," by Father Nash, S.J. ("Irish Messenger" Office, Dublin).

Poor frail human nature, in which there is so much that is noble and lovable! How many there are who embark on life's journey buoyed up with high-souled aspirations and who grow listless and inert before many knots have been covered! How many resolute promises to God are made and how few there are, comparatively, who prove their loyalty to Him when tested by the storms and winds and rain of temptation! What tears of bitter repentance for sin, followed by a return to husks of swine! Strange that it should be so, — on the one hand this craving for goodness and on the other this apparent inability to attain to it, at least permanently!

This is the place to pause for a moment in order to remind ourselves of a vastly consoling truth. It is very well worth while insisting with ourselves that it is quite a literal fact that the forces arrayed against us are indeed too strong for us. We have no chance against them. The enemy is a master of astuteness, and, in the "body of flesh" with its sinful tendencies, he finds a willing ally. (See Colossians 2:11.) Left to ourselves it is impossible for us even to conceive a good thought or cherish a holy desire. How much more impossible must it be to steer a straight course in face of the violent storms which continually threaten to capsize your little boat?

Do recognise that it is impossible. Admit readily to yourself that it cannot be done. But if this is true where does the consolation come in? Is not my utter helplessness calculated only to fill me with depression and make me give up the struggle altogether? What is the use in fighting sin and temptation if I am so hopelessly weak before them?

This attitude would be intelligible if we had to say that we were left to ourselves. But the same Lord Who assures us that without Him we can do nothing was far indeed from abandoning us to the buffetings out on life's ocean. The enemy is strong. Our merciful Lord has therefore provided us with a marvellous life-giving food precisely because we need so sorely a strength that is greater.

And that food is nothing less than His own Body and Blood. "Take ye and eat; this is My Body. Take ye and drink; this is My Blood. . . . He that eats My flesh and drinks My blood has everlasting life." (See Matthew 26:26-28, and John 6:53-55.) Long ago, the prophet (Elijah) fainted on his journey and was desperately tempted to lie down and die. But God sent him a strengthening bread from heaven. He ate and walked forty days till he reached Horeb the mount of God. Our souls, too, need strengthening Food and nobody knows that better than Our Lord. "If God be with me, who shall be against me?" (See Romans 8:31.) And through frequent and fervent reception of Holy Communion, God is in very truth living in me. What wonder that the enemy quails before His Face?

"Take and eat" this divine Food and see what will happen. You will find a new strength growing up within you, just the very strength you needed. When you have for a time made frequent and fervent Holy Communion a habit, you will some day begin to reflect within yourself on a happy change that has taken place in your life. Temptation is still there and well you know that it is always possible for you to fall. But while it is true that you recognise your weakness, it is none the less true that the attack has lost much of its force. Moreover passion, which formerly had such a strong appeal, now seems to have calmed considerably and the glittering objects with which it used to seduce you are seen to be after all, only so much tinsel. You have more confidence now without being in any way presumptuous. You have a sense of comforting security now, for passion though not dead, is no longer the imperious tyrant of other days. In a word, you have acquired strength, a strength to do what you know you should do and to avoid what you know you should leave undone.

Such a happy change! It is such a relief! How has this result come about? Your new-found strength is not your own. You are now receiving Holy Communion frequently and fervently and so you have within you the strength of Jesus Christ Himself. In a new sense, the words of Saint Paul are yours: "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me." (Galatians 2:20)

"Take and Eat." Never until we get to heaven, and not even then, shall we fully understand the anxiety of Jesus Christ for our eternal salvation. It is not fair to complain of our trials and temptations for no temptation is insuperable. "I can do all things in Him that strengthens me," (Philippians 4:13) and it is especially through this ineffable gift of Himself that Jesus pours His own strength, His own very life, into your soul.

He has sympathy with you in those attacks of the enemy. He understands how vehement can be the inclination to plunge recklessly into evil. But do not tax Him with leaving you without provision for the fight. You cannot go down if you depend on Him. You cannot be seriously wounded if His life is abiding in you. Or if you do fall and if you are wounded you will immediately rise again. That is why we say that monthly Holy Communion is good; weekly Holy Communion is better; daily Holy Communion, worthily received, is best of all. Why? Because the oftener you take and eat of this sacred Food the more your strength will increase, or better, the more His divine strength will wax

within your soul, and if God be with you who shall be against you? This is why He leaves Himself to you under the form of bread, — to indicate that Holy Communion is the source of strength.

There is scarcely a time a priest stands in a pulpit that he does not want to speak about this first effect of Holy Communion. Such a marvellous remedy for the frailty of human nature! One has had the happiness of seeing lives revolutionised by the regular and fervent reception of this divine Food. Weakness gone before His strength, fear and anxiety giving way to joy and trust, temptations that hitherto seemed to hold the poor captive in manacles of steel now broken at last and freedom restored — these are some of the wondrous results that accrue to the soul through the strength of Christ communicated to her by means of Holy Communion. Try it.

But what passes one's comprehension is that so many fail to use this divine remedy. You know you are a slave to impurity or drink, you know your soul is in imminent danger of being lost, you have lived in habitual carelessness. Do you tell me that you really desire to rise above all that welter of sin? To live once again the life worthy of your manhood? Do you say that you wish you could be pure but that your case seems hopeless? You are contradicted by no less a Person than Jesus Christ. "He that eats Me, the same also shall live by Me." (John 6:57-58)

Some months ago a priest said Mass on a Sunday morning in a country church. Out of a dense mass of men, only two or three received Holy Communion. Why? Must not one presume that in a big crowd like that, there were many sorely tempted, many possibly who had allowed themselves to be driven hither and thither before the violence of the storm? Yet here was the remedy and they will not take it. Here is the source of the very strength of God Himself, ready to place itself at their disposal and there they stand, staring vacantly before them, and letting the food pass them by. One wonders if they are in earnest about their cure at all seeing that they make so poor a use of the prescription left them by the Physician.

You cannot break off that occasion of sin, — without Christ. You cannot give up that companion who is leading you astray and whom you perhaps are leading astray, — without Christ. You have not a chance, with your weak vacillating will, of guiding your barque through the raging torrents, pitted against such a foe, unless Christ steers with you. But with Him what a difference! His strength gathering your weakness to Himself; His holiness transforming the ugliness of your sinfulness; His steady hand on the wheel and His unerring gaze fixed on the shore; in a word, His very life expanding each day more and more within your soul. "Take and eat" for you can do all things in Him Who gives you such a strength.

A certain man had been a daily communicant for many years. Once each week he had to drive to a city one hundred and forty miles distant from his home, and his business there required his presence at an early hour in the morning. His practice was, on arriving at that city, to pull up his car outside a Church and go into Mass and Holy Communion. He had driven one hundred and forty miles fasting and without a smoke, for the privilege of being able to receive Holy Communion, and this not once or twice but for many years. [Remember, the fast was from midnight, at the time.] Here was a man who realised that monthly Holy Communion was good; weekly Holy Communion better, but daily Holy Communion best of all. Did he have temptations? Of course he had. Did he succumb? Of course he did not. Or if he did, he at once recovered. Why? Because of the regular supplies of the grace of God, divine life itself, which were thus continually reaching his soul and strengthening his powers of resistance.

In many places of Holy Scripture, you have instances, sad indeed, of men who were brought to Our Lord because they were possessed by an evil spirit. The unfortunate man so possessed spoke as the evil spirit wished him to speak, moved as he ordered him to move, flinging himself here and there despite the efforts of the strongest men to hold him down. There is another sort of possession, a much happier possession, the possession which Our Lord designs to secure over your whole being through Holy Communion.

“Conprehensus sum a Christo Jesu”, writes Saint Paul. “I am apprehended, or seized upon by Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 3:12) The metaphor is from racing. The winner of the race seized upon his prize and held it in his possession as a sign of his prowess.

Now the prize most valued by Jesus Christ, the valiant Champion, is the soul and the heart and the mind of the creature fashioned by the hand of our heavenly Father. That He should love human nature to such an extent is a miracle that we shall not exhaust even in eternity. But of the fact, there can be no sort of doubt. This is the prize He longs to seize upon and to hold in His possession. And it is especially through Holy Communion worthily received that He secures His objective.

What does this possession by Christ imply? Think of the different faculties you possess and try to understand how, if this second effect of Holy Communion obtains, each will be brought under the controlling influence of Jesus Christ.

You possess first of all two interior faculties, your mind and your heart. The mind is the seat of thought. That mind of yours must henceforth cherish only the thoughts of Christ since He designs to acquire complete possession of it. “Let that mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 2:5)

Hence, you will carefully exclude from your mind all deliberate thoughts of impurity, of hatred, revenge, selfish greed. Why? Because that mind of yours now belongs to Christ since He has taken possession of it through Holy Communion. How then could you entertain thoughts of that sort seeing that they are so foreign to the mind of Christ?

And on the positive side, your mind will cultivate the thoughts that filled the mind of Christ. You know how He went about doing good to all men, ever thinking of their needs, always on the watch to help. The mind of which He has taken possession must be like Him henceforth, “all things to all men.” (1 Corinth 9:22) That divine Mind valued most highly the things that are above, treasure to be laid up in heaven where neither rust nor moth does consume. Receive frequently and fervently this divine Guest into your soul and you too will begin to relish eternal things, and the race for power or money or sin, which-occupies the thoughts and energies of the bulk of mankind will seem to you, what it is in reality, a foolish waste of time and opportunity. You will see life from a new angle, — the only opportunity you have of accumulating treasure in heaven, — and you will be all keenness to make the most of that one opportunity. Thus will you develop the mind of Christ through contact with Him in Holy Communion.

Then there is your heart, the seat of your affections. Of Saint Paul, it was said that the heart of Paul was the heart of Christ. Why? Because with his great apostolic love he embraced only the objects which were ever dear above all to the Sacred Heart, — the souls of men. When the mind is possessed by Christ light and conviction follow. When the heart comes under His divine influence, the will reaches out to lay hold upon souls and lead them to Christ for He is an ardent lover of souls. In Holy Communion then, He seeks to obtain this entire possession of your heart and fill it with the affections of His own Heart. Hence too, He will rigorously exclude all false unworthy objects.

Affection to sin must go because if Jesus loved sinners He hated intensely sin, which would rob them of the heaven prepared for them.

Your external faculties must also come under the power and control of Jesus through Holy Communion. Your eyes must never deliberately look at an object that He could not gaze upon. Why?

Because they belong to Him now since through Holy Communion He has taken possession of them. Your tongue upon which He rested must never utter an unkind word, still less must it spread lying gossip or foul language. It belongs to Him. It is His possession now since your Holy Communion. Your ears you will close to all that you know is opposed to what He would have you listen to. Your hands? His were roughened with toil; your hands too will be ready to serve others in any way in your power. Those hands of yours are His property since He owns you through Holy Communion. Therefore, He can use your hands to help His members, the members of His mystical Body. Finally, He must take possession of your feet. These you will not use to walk into occasions of sin. You will never allow them to lead you into places where He and His Blessed Mother cannot be welcome guests. Why? Because they now belong to Him. He has taken possession of them by means of Holy Communion.

The whole idea of Saint Paul's theology is that the life of Jesus should grow within us by a continual increase of divine grace in the soul. Now in Holy Communion we receive the very Source itself of all grace. That is why it is such a sovereignly effective means of bringing about the wonderful transformation in our faculties, which make them responsive to the most delicate touches of divine grace. Take and eat this Food regularly and fervently and a Christliness will necessarily follow. Monthly Holy Communion is good; weekly Holy Communion is better; daily Holy Communion is best of all.

Saint Catherine of Siena could never receive Holy Communion without falling into an ecstasy, which often lasted for hours afterwards. Saint Ignatius had the greatest difficulty in saying Mass on account of the abundance of tears he shed when he recalled the self-abasing and tender love of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. The Cure of Ars used to say that if we realised what the Mass is, we should die of love and wonder. Not so long ago a non-Catholic said to a Catholic: "If I believed what you Catholics say you believe about the Blessed Eucharist, I think I should never be off my knees." When Dr. Orchard was still a Protestant, he attended Mass one day and, on coming out of the Church, he said to his companion: "These Catholics may be right or they may be wrong in what they believe about the Eucharist. But one thing I know, — that priest who has just said Mass, he at least believes it." The reverent attitude of that priest, his very evident deep spirit of faith as he moved about the altar and handled the Sacred Host produced their effect and contributed towards the conversion of that great Catholic.

These things are said by way of introducing what we wish to bring forward as the third effect of fervent and frequent Holy Communion. Jesus does not give strength merely, nor does He content Himself with taking possession. Above all, through contact with Him is there enkindled in the heart a fire of burning love. "Hold Him and keep Him for your friend, Who, when all others forsake you will not abandon you or suffer you to perish in the end."

The man who is a regular and worthy communicant knows well the truth of the love of Jesus for him. He has not learned it out of books merely. He has not just listened to it in sermons. From his own intimate experience he understands, in a way he cannot tell you, that when Jesus Christ

stretches out His arms wide to embrace all men, when He proclaims from the house tops that His Heart is on fire with love for us in our waywardness and sinfulness, — contact with Christ has taught him well that this language of love is no metaphor but literal truth.

When Our Lord gave us this Gift He was seated with “His own” at the Supper Table. He saw that in that very night Judas would betray Him with a kiss. Peter would deny Him three times; cursing and swearing that he had never even heard His name. The rest of His own would scamper away from Him in terror at the first appearance of danger. And His “revenge” is to give them this Gift. “Take ye and eat.” Was there ever such a Lover?

And as He sat there, He looked down through the centuries and saw the Peters and the Judasas who would betray Him and repudiate His Gift. He saw the innumerable sacrileges that would desecrate His Eucharist. He saw that many would draw near to Him to receive Him, apparently indeed His friends, but in reality, even at that awful moment, — appalling thought, — their souls would be reeking with the guilt of mortal sin. Of all this He would have to complain to Saint Margaret Mary. Of ingratitude, and sacrilege, and forgetfulness, and this “even from those consecrated to Me!”

Why then does He give the Gift at all? If the vast bulk of mankind are going to treat Him thus, why will He knowingly allow the Bread of angels to be trampled underneath the feet of swine? Why? Because although the “vast majority” will repay His love with blasphemy, there will be at least a minority who will try to appreciate and love.

And so ardently does He crave for that love of man’s heart that He will go through all that sea of sin and sacrilege for the sake of that few.

When the priest bends over the chalice at the Consecration of the Mass, Holy Church puts on his lips the words: “This is the chalice . . . which will be poured out for you and for many . . . Pro vobis et pro multis. There is here a clear distinction. The Gift is first of all “pro vobis,” — for those around Him, His intimate friends, and only after them “pro multis,” — for the general multitude (the many). The inner circle may be small but so intense is His love that He will endure sacrileges and insults provided He can be its centre.

So we have now touched upon three effects brought about in the soul that “takes and eats” this Sacred Food. Strength, the very strength of Christ Himself. Possession, so that little by little Our Lord can control all that man’s faculties.

And lastly, a burning love which shrivels up the nonsense and the make believe of the world and establishes between Jesus and the soul a most holy and intimate and abiding familiarity. Yes, let us once again repeat our slogan. Monthly Holy Communion is good; weekly Holy Communion is better; daily Holy Communion, worthily received, is best of all.

Strengthened with Christ’s strength; possessed by Christ and possessing Him; loved by Him and loving Him ardently — if these are some of the wonders wrought by Holy Communion why are there so many who regard His Gift so casually? Why are there not many more daily communicants?

One reason we have touched upon already. It seems hard to excuse those who complain about the difficulties of living a good life if they refuse to use this wonderful antidote. Men going to war have to receive injections against disease. Every man on earth is fighting for his eternal salvation. He too needs an injection against the diseases that are sure to attack him, and the divine Physician has supplied it. It is an infallible Injection for it is His own precious Blood. If you do not use it, or use it

only haphazardly, who is to blame if you fall a victim to sin? The question is: Are you really in earnest at all about your eternal salvation?

But, apart from this class, there is another which makes only scant use of this Gift, though for a different reason. Many good Catholics will, say to you: “Yes, I could go to Holy Communion often, but I wouldn’t dare. The fact is that I am not worthy.” Did anybody ever remotely suggest that you were worthy? Does not common sense tell you at once that of course you are utterly unworthy? How could anyone of us, even the greatest saint, be worthy of admittance to this sacred Banquet? “If you had the purity of an angel and the holiness of John the Baptist you would not be worthy. . . .”

You receive Our Lord, not because you are worthy but because you are sorely in need of Him. “Without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5) The only worthiness strictly required is freedom from mortal sin. But what about venial sins? Certainly cleanse your soul of them before Holy Communion by a good act of contrition. But on no account should you allow them to keep you away. (Join the priest and servers in reciting the Confiteor, ‘I Confess’, or the Kyrie Eleison, ‘Lord have Mercy’, and you have made a good act of contrition.)

Here is a mother of a large family. Your youngest child spills tea on a new table cloth and you fly into a temper. Can you go to Holy Communion tomorrow? Certainly. Here is a lady walking down town and she runs into a bit of uncharitable gossip. Then reflects afterwards: What a pity! I suppose that now I can’t go to Holy Communion. Please let me say very emphatically that you can. Here is a man playing cards and the language grows a bit coarse. That indeed is not an ideal preparation for Holy Communion but if he has done his best to keep clear of that language, or even if he has smiled or put in his few words, let him make his act of sorrow and promise of amendment, and go to Holy Communion. You tell a small lie in order to get out of a scrape; you indulge a habit of laziness; you pray with distraction — these things need not keep you from Holy Communion.

To avoid all venial sin for a long period is impossible, without a special grace from God. But Holy Communion is one of the very best means of conquering these vicious habits. Venial sin disappears out of your soul when Christ enters into you in much the same way as darkness vanishes when you open the shutter and allow the glorious summer sun to stream into your room.

Nobody will misunderstand and argue that we seem to be condoning habits of venial sin. Far from it. Our only point for the moment is this; that venial sin does not constitute a barrier to the reception of this most Holy Sacrament. Everyone knows that no purity can be too great to receive the all-pure God. Everyone understands that frequent reception of Holy Communion should diminish enormously the frequency of venially sinful habits. So if you fall into venial sins make an act of contrition and go to Holy Communion and confess those sins at your next ordinary Confession (though, strictly speaking, this last is NOT necessary, but it is a very salutary habit to cultivate on your road to perfection.).

Suppose I commit a mortal sin and make an act of perfect contrition? Can I now go to Holy Communion, provided I have the intention of confessing at my next confession? No. This is a case where, with very rare exceptions, you should abstain from going to Holy Communion. As soon as you make your act of perfect contrition your sin is indeed entirely forgiven, *but there remains on you the obligation to confess it before you receive Holy Communion.* (Footnote: See “Heaven Open to All,” by Fr. Halpin, S.J. (“Irish Messenger” Office, Dublin).

The case would be different if you forgot to tell a mortal sin in Confession. You had your mind fully made up to tell it but somehow it went clean out of your head when you were kneeling before the priest. Can you go to Holy Communion? Yes. And how often? As often as you wish, not once or twice only. Your only obligation in this case is to tell the forgotten sin at your next ordinary Confession. If an opportunity turns up of going to Confession of which you would not ordinarily be availing yourself, there is no obligation on you to avail of it now merely because you forgot your sin. Hence, in this case, go to Holy Communion, and as often as you like, and tell the sin at your next ordinary Confession.

From what we have just been saying you see that it is not necessary to go to Confession each time you go to Holy Communion. Many excellent Catholics miss opportunities of receiving Our Lord because of this false notion. If you are going frequently to Holy Communion you are certainly to be recommended to go frequently also to Confession. But, provided you are keeping clear of mortal sin there is no reason in the world why you should not go to Holy Communion several times even though weeks may have elapsed during which you had not an opportunity of getting to Confession. (The Church's Law obliges us to go to Confession at least once a year, but even here, the OBLIGATION strictly applies to those in mortal sin.)

You have been to Confession on a Saturday and twelve days later, you are at Mass and you are fasting. IS there anything to keep you from receiving Holy Communion? Nothing at all provided you have not fallen meantime into mortal sin. And the same will be true in another week's time. Of course, we must again stress that frequent Confession is much to be recommended when you are receiving Holy Communion frequently. But recommendation is one thing and obligation is another, and it is a pity if you miss a chance of receiving Our Lord when you might lawfully and laudably avail of it.

Sometimes people find themselves caught the other way, that is, they have opportunity of going to Confession but they cannot get to Holy Communion. You have to deliver milk or go to the factory on a Sunday morning and it is impossible for you, especially at certain seasons, to go frequently to Holy Communion. But what about Confession? There is no difficulty, you say, about that on the previous Saturday. But what's the use when I'm not able to go to Holy Communion? There is every use. Every sacrament brings grace to your soul. If you cannot receive both sacraments do make sure of at least one and you will reap much benefit.

[Bear in mind, throughout this pamphlet that the rules of fasting were much stricter in the 1940's than they are now, after the more generous discipline that followed Vatican II. Perhaps twenty-first century Catholics would reap greater benefit from the ease of access to the great Sacrament of the Church, if they kept in mind the many sacrifices in this area made by their forebears. This particularly applies to what follows.]

Perhaps it may be well to insert a word here about the privilege sick people have concerning the Eucharistic fast. If a man has been laid up for a month (roughly twenty-four or twenty-five days), he can receive Holy Communion without keeping the fast from midnight. "Laid up" does not mean that he has to be actually in bed all during that month. Perhaps he sits up for a few hours or even goes out in the sunshine during the day, or can manage even a little walk in his garden. Now if he has been in that state for about a month he can get leave from his Confessor to receive Holy Communion twice in each week, even though he has taken liquid food during the previous night. And with that permission, he is allowed to drink, not once only, but as often as he needs on each of



the two nights. He can drink tea, or liquid medicine, or a “beaten-up” egg — anything provided it does not lose its character of being liquid.

Note that he must have completed the twenty-four or twenty-five days. It does not suffice that the doctor tells him he is going to be laid up for that period or longer. Note too that if he can manage to keep the fast on other nights he can receive Holy Communion oftener than twice a week and use his privilege. Thus, perhaps on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday nights he does not take any drink after midnight. On each of the following mornings, he can go to Holy Communion. If he takes drink now on Thursday and Friday he can still use his privilege as a sick man. [The modern discipline demands only 15 minutes of fasting by the sick and their carers, and even that can be exempted for Pastoral reasons, on application to the priest administering the Holy Communion. One is regarded as ‘sick’, if one is sick, and there is no longer a legalistic definition of that state, as the Church now expects her children to be sincere and forthright in their approach to the Sacrament.]

It is also to be stated, that one can always avail of “new time” in computing the hour of midnight. At present, we are one hour and twenty-five minutes “ahead of the sun”. Consequently, a man may take food up till twenty-five minutes past one a.m. and receive Holy Communion at Mass that same morning. [The modern discipline now only requires a fast of one hour prior to the reception of the Blessed Sacrament and, in addition, water is permitted at any time.]

What is to be said about smoking before receiving Holy Communion? It does not break the fast and therefore need not prevent you from going. But, as an act of reverence and self-denial, you are to be recommended to abstain.

Having dealt with those who neglect this great antidote out of carelessness and also with those who refrain from Holy Communion through a false conscience, it remains that a word be said about those who actually do receive Our Lord frequently and yet, it would seem, do not reap the grand effects set forth in the beginning of this paper. [Sadly, this is the more common twenty-first century dilemma.] Perhaps you have heard it said that sin was never more prevalent and yet the crowds at the altar rails were never so big. You have our magnificent First Fridays, our Mission and Retreat Communion, our Sodalties and Confraternities with their regular reception of Holy Communion. And yet, in spite of all this there are such terrifying stories abroad about sin and laxity of every kind. What is wrong? If Holy Communion is so frequent and yet crime so common can it be affirmed that the Gift is such a sovereign remedy after all? An anecdote or two will help with the answer.

Mass was just over in the small country Church on Sunday morning. I was kneeling in the organ gallery and I noted with joy that large numbers approached the altar for Holy Communion. It was a grand sight. Especially was I edified by the big number of young men who drew near to receive Our Lord and returned with hands devoutly joined to their places. Such fine numbers and such reverence — but, in less than five minutes after the priest had left the altar, the Church was practically empty. I saw one man and his wife and child remain some considerable time in thanksgiving. Here and there, an isolated person, mostly women and girls, stayed on. But the vast bulk of that crowd had vanished. Out of that big number, it was literally true that scarcely a dozen in all remained behind to thank Him for His Gift for even ten minutes.

Three young girls, aged about eighteen or nineteen, came running to Mass. The priest was distributing Holy Communion. The girls had been chatting and joking right up to the Church door.

Then a hurried splash of holy water and a quick glance towards the altar. Yes. They were in time. There were still two or three people waiting for Holy Communion so our three little friends almost

ran up the Church, fell on their knees at the altar steps, and, all flushed and breathless, received Holy Communion.

The little lad had served my Mass with becoming attention and precision. Each morning during the retreat, he had presented himself at the usual time for Holy Communion. We came back together into the sacristy about six or seven minutes later. During that few minutes he had been occupied with his duties as server and could have scarcely done more than mumble an aspiration or two. Immediately on reaching the sacristy, he pulled off his little cassock and was gone. What of his thanksgiving? He just didn't make one. (Of course devout attention to the prayers and actions of the concluding rites of the Mass went some way to correcting this lack, but where was his heartfelt adoration and thanks?)

On the last day of the retreat, when I knew that I should not be saying Mass there again next morning I asked him if he had ever been told about thanksgiving after Holy Communion. Ever been taught that it was usual to spend at least a quarter of an hour thanking Our Lord and asking Him for the graces we need? He was a fine youngster and I believe he answered me truthfully. No. He was quite sure he had never been told about that quarter of an hour. And where was he going to school? It is hardly for me to tell you! But he told me and his answer surprised me. (It was a Catholic College, run by religious, held in high repute.)

A few years ago, the Sacred Congregation of the Sacraments issued an instruction about frequent and daily Holy Communion. Those who promote this most praiseworthy habit are warned to impress on their disciples the need for care concerning the conditions necessary for worthy reception of this most Holy Sacrament. Anything like "dragooning" people into going to Holy Communion is severely reprobated. Setting too much store on mere numbers is much to be blamed.

It is not mere numbers that the Church wants. It is not mere routine reception of Holy Communion that will work in souls the wonders outlined above. Are we allowing our young folk to dash up and dash down without a word of preparation and thanksgiving? Are we stressing the actual reception of Holy Communion to the detriment of the need of approaching this most Holy Sacrament with due reverence, and employing our quarter of an hour afterwards in some effort to thank Our Lord? Are we guilty ourselves of this want of proper dispositions? If we are, let us not seek farther for an answer to our query. Holy Communion does not work like a charm, a talisman.

Yes, we thank the Lord with a full and grateful heart for those First Fridays and those packed altar rails, but once again let us not rest on our oars. The mere mechanical reception is not enough.

We have to bring proper dispositions, not adequate indeed, for that is impossible, but at least that measure of adequacy which our poverty can supply.

Attentive, fervent Holy Communion is what the Pope is pleading for. That too is what will bring those grand effects spoken of. It is what Jesus Christ has a right to expect from us. Is He receiving it?

That flippancy shows itself in another way too. From time to time one comes across a disgusting sentimentality in this matter of receiving the Sacraments, especially Holy Communion. Let me explain. You have a young person making the nine Fridays, or a member of the Confraternity. Of course, nothing would induce them to omit the Confraternity Holy Communion, or to "break" the Fridays. But side by side with that resolve, excellent in itself, you have that person living in a free proximate occasion of serious sin. Have they the remotest notion of breaking that? Not they! They

quite possibly have arranged to go back to it that very night; albeit to watch their pious attitude now, you would think them fit to be classed with the saints. Or they are living beyond their means, indulging every extravagant whim, having outgrown, of course, the old-fashioned idea of paying their bills!

There is a want of solidity in their religion. Let the Almighty accommodate Himself and His Laws to their way of thinking and they will willingly serve Him! They like to “feel” holy, and Holy Communion gives them that feeling, especially if there is some favourite hymn played and sung well at the time. But as for changing their lives, or breaking off that occasion of sin, or paying what they owe! Does it cross their mind that mere sentiment is no service? That this lip-service is a mockery? That true religion is that which makes a person order his life as God means it to be ordered? Feeling may come or go, but the true servant of God is not swayed by it. He is loyal especially in times of stress. And if he sees clearly that his life is out of joint with the teaching of Christ then he resolves, and at least tries sincerely, to change what is amiss. And, it is that sincerity and consistency which draws down abundant blessings on him when he receives Holy Communion!

So it is not mere numbers that Christ wants. He complains, indeed, that there are many who abandon Him, but in those who do draw near Him, He surely has a right to look for proper dispositions. It is a catastrophe if even those who do come, think lightly of the supreme and sacred act they are performing.

“As He entered into a certain town there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And lifted up their voices saying ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.’ Whom when He saw He said ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’ And it came to pass that as they went they were made clean. And one of them when he saw that he was made clean went back, with a loud voice glorifying God. And he fell on his face before His feet, giving thanks; and this was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said: ‘Were not ten made clean; and where are the nine? There is no one found to return and give glory to God but this stranger’.” (Luke chapter 17.)

That complaint was wrung from the Sacred Heart by the evident ingratitude of the nine. Would you accuse those of whom we speak, of base ingratitude towards Christ for the Gift of Himself in the Blessed Eucharist? I leave the answer to yourself, especially if you must number yourself amongst those who rush up and rush down without preparation or thanksgiving. Base ingratitude, perhaps no. But lack of a deep spirit of solid piety, lamentable want of the spirit of faith, yes. And it is this want, that atrophies the effects of Holy Communion.

If you place a wet log on the fire, it will not light until the moisture is first expelled. If you sit on a hillside in summer before a beautiful panorama, you won’t appreciate the beauty unless you open your eyes. If you are gasping with thirst, you won’t assuage it by simply feeling that you have drunk a glass of spring water. In all these cases, where there is question of producing heat, or enjoying the lovely landscape, or easing your thirst, you have to secure co-operation. You must place the log to be dried. You must use your eyes and you must raise the glass to your lips and drink.

In much the same way, there has to be co-operation between Our Lord and yourself when you meet in Holy Communion. All the treasures on earth are useless unless they can be enjoyed. All the “unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8) will not enrich your soul unless you come to receive Christ with proper dispositions and try to realise what you are about.

One is inclined to pursue this matter further and to ask: “Do they know Christ at all, these people we have in mind?” Generally, they know a fair amount about the ‘doctrines of His Church’. Often

they can rattle off definitions for you about the matter and form of a sacrament, the impediments of marriage, the essentials of an act of perfect contrition. All excellent things to know. Often they can give you dates at will; they can tell the year of the definition of such and such a dogma, when this Council assembled and when it dispersed and why. No one has any quarrel with dates and dogma, of course.

But is the complaint justified which one often hears made up and down the country, and bitterly made, by those who have to teach religion, that so much time is consumed and so much energy expended in hammering dates and figures and facts into the heads of children that there is none left for Christ Himself? Is there a danger that Christ and His loveliness are obscured if not entirely lost amidst this maze of facts that have to be marshalled round about Him?

A little Irish girl aged twenty came some time ago to speak to her parish priest. She declared in all seriousness that she was in love with an atheist and a foreigner whom she had picked up during his week or two while the boat he belonged to was alongside. At first, the priest treated the tale as a joke and laughed at her. But she meant business and had come to see what arrangements could be made about the marriage. Then the priest remonstrated. Did she not know what the Church taught about the evils of mixed marriages? Did she never learn at school about the impediments? He was met with a toss of the head and a breezy: "O, of course, Father. But then we all looked upon that as just useful for the exams!"

Is our religious training superficial? Is our programme too crowded? If reception of the all-holy and all-loving God in Holy Communion is fast becoming mechanical, is it because we do not teach our children the reality of that holiness and that love and that loveliness? Have we to admit that they know not Christ Himself even if they do know quite a lot about Him?

Let me borrow here, with permission, an idea propounded by a priest for his children. He explains to them that the suffix "een" in the Irish dialects, signifies a small person who has not yet fully grown up, such as a colleen. Thus, in my home county, Maureen is the growing girl, while Maire is generally the girl who has attained to maturity. (Our English friends just stuck to 'Mary'.) In the same way, Christ is our Elder Brother. He has attained to full stature. He is grown up. And what are we? Each of us is a 'Christ-een' — a little Christ, "growing up in Christ" as Saint Paul expresses it. (See Ephesians 6:10.) One can see at a glance what wonderful developments this beautiful idea is capable of, how it can be made to serve as a foundation on which to build deep love for that Elder Brother. In this way, the child comes to regard Our Lord as an intimate Friend, one of the family, and each Holy Communion welds the more closely the bond of love between the two. And is not this to teach religion? Is it not the burden of Saint Paul's wonderful epistles?

Let us teach them Christ Our Lord — what manner of Man He was; what He thought about current problems, about war, and money-making and pleasure-seeking ; what He loved and valued ; how His conduct was ever consistent with His teaching, for "He began to do and to teach." (Acts 1:1) Then let them understand something about sanctifying grace, that marvellous gift which makes the human soul His Tabernacle. "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me." (Galatians 2:20)

The life of Christ is to expand more and more in that soul and the barriers are broken down by self-sacrifice. According as the divine life expands within, it manifests itself more and more in one's external conduct so that the child becomes like the Elder Brother even in his way of speaking and acting and judging. The great question always is: What would Christ say to this? How would He answer? How would He behave in these circumstances?

Conprehensus sum a Christo Jesu. ('I am apprehended, or seized upon by Jesus Christ.' Philippians 3:12) He grows more and more into the soul of the child. He becomes the child's greater self. Is this teaching religion? Granted that a course on these lines may not have some of the advantages of another course. Granted that the child may know less about definitions and dates and facts and figures. Granted that he may not shine in an examination where theory supersedes practice. But would it be worth the price if he were thus led to a closer and more intimate knowledge of the love and loveliness of Jesus Christ?

And if our children grew up in Christ in this way and advanced each day in a personal love of Him would not that love be bound to affect their attitude towards Holy Communion? Our Lord complained at the Supper Table that even His own did not know Him. "So long a time have I been with you and you have not known Me?" (John 14:9) And lifting up His eyes He declared that this is eternal life that "they may know You, the one true God, and Jesus Christ Whom You have sent." (John 17:3) Are we doing our part to acquire that knowledge and to impart it to others?

Small wonder that, without this knowledge, when they approach Him they develop the slipshod habit of coming without preparation and running away without thanksgiving. Small wonder that the evil habit contracted in childhood sets firmer as the years of youth and adolescence come on. Small wonder that the Christ, looking out over the empty Church is forced to ask: "Where are the nine? Does only one in ten understand what Holy Communion is? Does only one in ten appreciate this Gift of God for what it is? Does only one in ten know Christ and nine in ten know merely about Him? One in ten! And where are the nine?"

(Thanks to Irish Messenger Office.)

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