

The Gift of Thanksgiving

The Eucharist is the mysterious sacramental presence of Jesus Christ that stands at the center of the Church's life. In recognition of this treasure, Pope John Paul II has given us a Eucharistic year which began on October 10, 2004. In his pastoral letter on the year of the Eucharist, Most Reverend Sean P. O'Malley, Archbishop of Boston says "The Eucharistic year is to help us stir up a healthy appetite for God, a hunger for holiness, for union with God." The primary and indispensable means of fostering this hunger and deepening this union is to worthily receive our Lord in Holy Communion. Now we can enormously enhance the action of Jesus within us by fervent preparation and a devout thanksgiving. In this article, we will focus on the very important practice of making a thanksgiving after receiving Holy Communion.

The Importance of Spending Time in Prayer after Holy Communion

One of the principal reasons for the spiritual darkness of many Catholics is the lack of attention shown to our Eucharistic Lord while he is intimately united with them in Holy Communion. In a private revelation, Jesus sadly explains this situation to St. Faustina Kowalska: "My great delight is to unite myself with souls...When I come to a human heart in Holy Communion, my hands are full of graces which I want to give to the soul. But souls do not pay any attention to me: they leave me to myself and busy themselves with other things. Oh, how sad I am that souls do not recognize love. They treat me as a dead object" (Diary 1385).

Jesus Christ received in Holy Communion is the most powerful means through which man can be

helped to know and love God more deeply. But our Lord helps us in proportion to the attention and love with which we receive him. Hence St. Mary Magdalene De Pazzi says, "The minutes that follow Communion are the most precious we have in our lives. They are the minutes best suited on our part for treating with God, and on his part for communicating His love to us" (Jesus, Our Eucharistic Lord, p. 37).

Methods of Thanksgiving after Mass

Perhaps the most common method of prayer after Mass is to recite the traditional, Catholic post-communion prayers. Some prefer the familiar *Anima Christi* (Soul of Christ, sanctify me...); others, prayers written by St. Thomas Aquinas or other saints. This is a commendable practice and if you feel most comfortable with this method, by all means continue this pious custom.

An alternative, which can be even more effective, is to speak to Jesus directly from the heart. Remember, Jesus loves you more deeply than anyone else does. He should be your best and most trusted friend. Therefore, just as with our earthly friends, we should share the most important matters of our lives with him.

Listed below are some suggested methods.

Seek Our Lord's Blessing on all Your Activities

One method is to make an offering of yourself to our Lord. The idea is to plan your life according to His will. If you foresee trials or have major issues to contend with, ask Him to direct your actions. Pay close attention to any inspirations or solutions that may pop into your mind at Communion or later in the day. Generally, God speaks to us through our reason, so you will probably just "figure out" a solution or course of action, not



Illumination from *The Bedford Hours*, Paris c. 1423

necessarily connecting it to your petition after Communion.

Bring Your Problems to the Pre-Eminent Counselor and Physician

Another option is to bring your spiritual problems to the Supernatural Physician for healing. For example, you might say: “Lord Jesus, I do not feel an emotional love for my spouse anymore. Help me to be faithful to my marriage vows;” or, “Lord Jesus, I suspect my son is starting to lead an immoral life. Give me the words to say; and him the ability to understand the message you wish to tell him through me.” Don’t expect miracles overnight, although they may happen! Usually God works gradually, almost imperceptibly, lest we become proud.

The Doctor of prayer, St. Teresa of Avila, affirms this approach: “Let us entertain ourselves lovingly with Jesus and do not waste the hour that follows communion. It is an excellent time to deal with God and put before him the matters that concern our soul.” (*Jesus, Our Eucharistic Lord* p. 37).

Conclude with Sentiments of Gratitude and Love

In addition, no thanksgiving is complete without a heartfelt expression of gratitude. Assuming your intentions are good, trust that Jesus has assisted you in some manner during the time of Communion with Him. This is simply exercising our faith in the goodness, wisdom, and power of God which is a prerequisite, so to say, for him to act in our life. Thank him for these favors and plead with him to always allow you to receive him in Holy Communion.

If this sounds too complex or spiritual, it’s not in practice. God is primarily looking at the purity of your intention, not how well you compose your prayers. St. Peter Julian Eymard has some helpful advice on this matter: “The inward conversation after Communion does not demand a high degree of spirituality. If you have a good will, Jesus will speak to you, and you will understand his words; for he speaks the language of the heart which is understood by all.” (*Holy Communion*, p. 52).

Before we conclude, let us look at two common objections that might seem to be barriers to making a proper thanksgiving after Mass.

What if I am Unable to Stay after Mass?

The duties of state are always the first priority in the spiritual life. Therefore, if you have small children to care for or have to rush off to work, our Lord understands. In these cases, try your best to thank him

while still in church and on the way to your next destination. If even this is not possible, thank him at a more suitable time of the day. God is not limited by space and time in rewarding your gratitude.

Our Church is Like a Carnival after Mass. I Cannot Give Thanksgiving

This is a widespread, serious problem. The laughing and talking after Mass in some parishes make it almost impossible to make a quiet thanksgiving after receiving Holy Communion. In addition, people fear being labeled a “religious fanatic” if they do not conform to the crowd.

Here much prudence and courage are required. Normally we want to do nothing to draw attention to ourselves in Church, but there is a spiritual principle that allows for an exception. If, in a particular situation, you are doing what is right before God, do that action even if the whole world thinks it odd. According to an official document of the Church: “The faithful are to be recommended not to omit to make a proper thanksgiving after Communion.” (*Inestimabile Donum* §17). Therefore, do not omit the thanksgiving because of what other people may think. Indeed, the fact that it takes courage makes it more meritorious to remain in the pew in prayer after Mass.

Perhaps it would be easier for those wishing to stay after Mass to band together in a group. This might ease the uncomfortable feeling of “singularity” and provide a more powerful example. Either way, the world has a great need for courageous witnesses who are willing to show the proper reverence and respect after receiving the sacrament of Holy Communion. Who knows? Your silent witness may lead other souls to more fruitful communions and eternal life.

The Holy Eucharist Alone Has the Answers to all of Life’s Problems

We live in a period of history where purported solutions to the problems of mankind abound. Self-help books and specialists claim to have the definitive answers to the problems of life. Some are helpful, but many lead us astray. Only God knows what is best for us personally.

Jesus working through his mysterious presence in the Holy Eucharist will perfect our spiritual life and help us find our true selves. He will change our viewpoint in life, confirm our will in choosing the good, and sweeten our personality thus enabling us to deepen our personal relations. So spend time with Jesus after receiving Holy Communion to beseech his favors, to thank him, and to love him. Then our Lord will lead you to true “self-development” which is just another word for sanctity. ✨