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Relevance of U.S. Bishops' Document:

"Happy Are Those Who Are Called To His Supper": On Preparing to Receive Christ Worthily In The Eucharist"

Introduction

A. Spring 2004 Debates over Pro-Abortion Politicians

1. Several Bishops came out in favor of denying Holy Communion (Burke, Sheridan, Myers)
2. Other U.S. Bishops came out and said they feared that the Communion Line may become politicized. Of these, some taught clearly that pro-abortion Catholic politicians should refrain from coming to Holy Communion. Others remained mute on the point and simply said that everyone needs to examine his or her conscience before coming to Holy Communion.
3. 48 Democratic Politicians signed a letter saying they were alarmed.
4. Controversial Meeting in Denver. U.S. Bishops released a brief statement in which they affirmed:
 - a. Abortion is always intrinsically evil and can never be justified and the U.S. Bishops need to continue to teach it clearly and unequivocally.
 - b. Church needs to do a better job of persuading and dialoguing with others about the dignity of human life, especially with public officials.
 - c. Catholics need to act in support of Catholic principles on life.
 - d. If those who perform an abortion and those who cooperate willingly in the action are fully aware of the objective evil of what they do, they are guilty of grave sin and thereby separate themselves from God's grace.
 - e. Catholic public officials who act consistently to support abortion on demand risk making themselves cooperators in evil in a public manner. They should never be honored by Catholic institutions or given platforms to advance their positions.
 - f. Every believer needs to examine his conscience as to the worthiness to approach Holy Communion, including their fidelity to the moral teaching of the Church in personal and public life.
 - g. The decision about whether to deny Holy Communion rests at the prudential judgment of the individual bishop in accord with established canonical and pastoral principles.
5. After the meeting, a memo from then Cardinal Ratzinger was leaked to the press. Vatican reporters implied it was leaked because it was basically ignored. It said:
 - a. Presenting oneself to receive Holy Communion should be a conscious decision, based on a reasoned judgment regarding one's worthiness to do so, according to the Church's objective criteria, asking such questions as: "Am I in full communion with the Catholic Church? Am I guilty of grave sin? Have I incurred a penalty (e.g. excommunication, interdict) that forbids me to receive Holy Communion? Have I prepared myself by fasting for at least an hour?" The practice of indiscriminately presenting oneself to receive Holy Communion, merely as a consequence of being present at Mass, is an abuse that must be corrected (cf. Instruction "Redemptionis Sacramentum," nos. 81, 83).
 - b. Abortion and euthanasia are grave sins that must be opposed by conscientious objection. Catholics have a grave obligation not to cooperate in these practices, especially formally. "This cooperation can never be justified either by invoking respect for the freedom of others or by appealing to the fact that civil law permits it or requires it."
 - c. Not all issues have the same moral weight as abortion and Euthanasia (e.g., capital punishment and war).
 - d. Apart from an individual's judgment about his worthiness to present himself to receive the Holy Eucharist, the minister of Holy Communion may find himself in the situation where he must refuse to distribute Holy Communion to someone, such as in cases of a declared excommunication, a declared interdict, or an obstinate persistence in manifest grave sin (cf. can. 915).
 - e. Regarding the grave sin of abortion or euthanasia, when a person's formal cooperation becomes manifest (understood, in the case of a Catholic politician, as his consistently campaigning and voting for permissive abortion and euthanasia laws), his Pastor should meet with him, instructing him about the Church's teaching, informing him that he is not to present himself for Holy Communion until he brings to an end the objective situation of sin, and warning him that he will otherwise be denied the Eucharist.
 - f. When "these precautionary measures have not had their effect or in which they were not possible," and the person in question, with obstinate persistence, still presents himself to receive the Holy Eucharist, "the

minister of Holy Communion must refuse to distribute it" (cf. Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts Declaration "Holy Communion and Divorced, Civilly Remarried Catholics" [2002], nos. 3-4). This decision, properly speaking, is not a sanction or a penalty. Nor is the minister of Holy Communion passing judgment on the person's subjective guilt, but rather is reacting to the person's public unworthiness to receive Holy Communion due to an objective situation of sin.

- g. [N.B. A Catholic would be guilty of formal cooperation in evil, and so unworthy to present himself for Holy Communion, if he were to deliberately vote for a candidate precisely because of the candidate's permissive stand on abortion and/or euthanasia. When a Catholic does not share a candidate's stand in favour of abortion and/or euthanasia, but votes for that candidate for other reasons, it is considered remote material cooperation, which can be permitted in the presence of proportionate reasons.]

6. Later developments

- a. After the confusion, and after the November 2004 election, Archbishop John Myers of Newark proposed that a document be written that could teach clearly just what are the requirements for worthy participation in the Eucharist.
- b. Many bishops said that the problem of unworthy reception of Holy Communion goes way beyond the question of politicians. It's a common experience at weddings and funerals that people come up to receive Holy Communion who aren't Catholic or who haven't practiced the faith for a long time.
- c. Such clear instruction would be the first step toward bringing some order and making sure scandal was avoided. It was fulfilling the condition Cardinal Ratzinger mentioned about clearly instructing about the Church's teaching.
- d. That led to the formation of the present document, written to all U.S. Catholics.

B. Document itself — Outline. Nov 2004

- Introduction
- Part I — What does the Church believe about Holy Communion?
- Part II — What is the significance of being united to Christ in Holy Communion?
- Part III — Who May Receive Holy Communion?
- Part IV — Should We Ever Refrain From Holy Communion?
- Part V — How Can We Prepare To Receive Holy Communion More Worthily?
- Conclusion
- Appendix I — May non-Catholics receive Holy Communion in the Catholic Church?
- Appendix II — May Catholics Participate In and Receive Holy Communion in Other Churches and Ecclesial Communities

C. Document itself — Gloss

1. I have brought copies and I will leave the Introduction and Parts I and II for you to read at home. For those who have received a solid catechesis it will be nothing new. It affirms
- a. The Eucharist is Jesus Christ, not a holy piece of bread. We receive his living, risen and glorified body, blood, soul and divinity — in other words, his entire humanity and divinity.
- b. During the Mass, Christ, through the power of the HS working through the priest, completely changes the substance of the bread and wine into Christ while the appearances of the bread and wine remain.
- c. In the Mass, we participate in Christ's Sacrifice of himself to the Father to take away our sins. The Mass is both a sacrifice and a banquet, and, when received worthily, brings us into communion with God and with one another. Mass is a foretaste of heaven as well as a spur to loving others with Christ's total self-giving love.
- d. Before Christ, the greatest gift, we must cry out with the Centurion that we are not worthy. "None of us is worthy of so great a gift."
2. Part III — Who May Receive Holy Communion?
- a. With few exceptions, only those who are members of the Catholic Church may receive Holy Communion at a Catholic Eucharistic liturgy. Being baptized and sharing in the Church's faith are, therefore, conditions for full participation in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which culminates in the reception of Holy Communion.
- b. We need to be in Communion to be fit to receive Holy Communion. Appendix cites St. Justin Martyr from the 2nd century who has presented the traditional three-fold criteria: "No one is allowed to partake except one who believes that the things we teach are true, and has received the washing for forgiveness of sins and for rebirth, and who lives as Christ handed down to us."
- i. Doctrinal Communion — "believes the things we teach are true"

- ii. Sacramental and Ecclesial Communion — “has received the washing for forgiveness of sins and for rebirth,” in other words, baptism and the sacramental system it initiates.
 - iii. Moral Communion — “lives as Christ handed down to us.”
- 3. Part IV — Should We Ever Refrain From Holy Communion?
 - a. The answer is yes, whenever we lack any of this three-fold communion with Christ and his body the Church. But we’ll get to that.
 - b. Bishops say first:
 - i. As Catholics, we are ordinarily free to receive Holy Communion.
 - ii. It’s desirable that we receive the Lord’s body and blood.
 - iii. We should cherish the Eucharist and strive to receive Holy Communion regularly, gratefully and worthily.
 - c. Then they cite three general categories calling us to refrain:
 - i. Lack of Sanctifying Grace
 - a) In order to receive Holy Communion we must be in communion with God and with the Church.
 - b) Mortal sin constitutes a rejection of communion with God and destroys the life of grace within us. Mortal sin is an act violating God’s law that involves grave matter and that is performed with both full knowledge and complete consent of the will
 - c) If we are no longer in the state of grace because of mortal sin, we are seriously obliged to refrain from receiving Holy Communion until we are reconciled with God and the Church.
 - d) Because our sin has separated us from God and from our brothers and sisters in Christ, we have forfeited our right to receive Holy Communion, for the Eucharist, by its very nature, expresses and nurtures this life-giving unity that the sinner has now lost.
 - e) Manifesting the Father’s mercy, Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Penance precisely to allow us to confess our sins in repentance, receive absolution from the priest, and so receive again the grace of the Holy Spirit, who once more makes us living members of Christ’s body, the Church.
 - f) Catholics who are conscious of committing any mortal sin must receive the Sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion
 - g) It specifies a partial list of grave matter — thoughts, actions and omissions violating love of God or neighbor based on the 10 Commandments — by which we must form our consciences.
 - i) Believing in or honoring as divine anyone or anything other than the God of the Holy Scriptures
 - ii) Swearing a false oath while invoking God as a witness
 - iii) Failing to worship God by missing Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation without a serious reason, such as sickness or the absence of a priest
 - iv) Acting in serious disobedience against proper authority; dishonoring one’s parents by neglecting them in their need and infirmity
 - v) Committing murder, including abortion and euthanasia; harboring deliberate hatred of others; sexual abuse of another, especially of a minor or vulnerable adult; physical or verbal abuse of others that causes grave physical or psychological harm
 - vi) Engaging in sexual activity outside the bonds of a valid marriage
 - vii) Stealing in a gravely injurious way, such as robbery, burglary, serious fraud, or other immoral business practices
 - viii) Speaking maliciously or slandering people in a way that seriously undermines their good name
 - ix) Producing, marketing, or indulging in pornography
 - x) Engaging in envy that leads one to wish grave harm to someone else
 - ii. Lack of Adherence to Church Teaching (“who do not believe the things we teach are true”)
 - a) As Catholics we believe what the Church authoritatively teaches on matters of faith and morals, for to hear the voice of the Church, on matters of faith and morals, is to hear the voice of Christ himself. To give selective assent to the teachings of the Church not only deprives us of her life-giving message, but also seriously endangers our communion with her.
 - b) Some Catholics may not fully understand the Church’s doctrinal and moral teaching on certain issues. They may have certain questions and even uncertainties. In these situations of honest doubt and confusion, they are welcome to partake of Holy Communion, as long as they are prayerfully and honestly striving to understand the truth of what the Church professes and are

taking appropriate steps to resolve their confusion and doubt. Individuals who experience serious difficulties with or doubts about Church teaching **should carefully study** those Church teachings from authentic sources **and seek advice** from a confessor or pastor.

- c) If a Catholic in his or her personal or professional life were knowingly and obstinately to reject the defined doctrines of the Church, or knowingly and obstinately to repudiate her definitive teaching on moral issues, however, he or she would seriously diminish his or her communion with the Church. Reception of Holy Communion in such a situation would not accord with the nature of the Eucharistic celebration, so that he or she should refrain.
- iii. Giving Public Scandal
 - a) When a person is publicly known to have committed serious sin or to have rejected definitive Church teaching and is not yet reconciled with the Church, reception of Holy Communion by that person is likely to cause scandal for others. This is a further reason for refraining from receiving Holy Communion.
 - b) To give scandal to lead others to do evil by one's example. One becomes his neighbor's tempter."
- d. What should one do who does not receive?
 - i. The bishops mention that if one refrains from Holy Communion for whatever reason, they should still participate in the Mass, hear the Word of God and pray that the Word work within them.
 - ii. Make spiritual communion, 'express in their hearts the desire to unite themselves to the Lord in the reception of his sacred Body and Blood.'
 - iii. Moreover, they are encouraged to join themselves in heart and mind with Christ in Eucharistic adoration, such as Benediction.
4. Part V — How Can We Prepare To Receive Holy Communion More Worthily?
 - a. Without saying it, bishops make an analogy to wedding preparation. That's fitting because we're really dealing with the wedding feast of the Lamb and we're the bride. Three stages in wedding preparation are all present.
 - i. Remote
 - ii. Proximate
 - iii. Immediate
 - b. Remote preparation — how we live our Christian lives every day. It includes:
 - i. *Regular prayer and Scripture reading* — Both allow the Holy Spirit to work within us and so engender a love for Jesus and a desire to do the will of the Father in our lives. Especially recommended is the Liturgy of the Hours, which is the prayer of the Church with Christ and through Christ to the Father. All of these are particularly appropriate before the Blessed Sacrament.
 - ii. *Faithful and loving fulfillment of the duties and responsibilities of our state in life* — These responsibilities will differ insofar as one is a single person, a spouse, or a parent; a child, adolescent, or young adult; a grandparent; a bishop, priest, or deacon, or one in consecrated life; a worker or retired person; one who is healthy or one who is infirm. It is by faithfully living out in our daily lives the call of the Gospel to love God and our neighbor — especially the poor and the vulnerable — that we grow in charity, and so draw closer to Jesus and to one another.
 - iii. *Daily repentance of sin and regular participation in the Sacrament of Penance* Sin undermines and weakens our communion not only with the Blessed Trinity but also with one another. Therefore, in order to overcome the damage caused by sin, we are called to daily repentance and to regular participation in the Sacrament of Penance. Briefly examining our consciences and making an act of contrition, such before retiring at night, helps guide our repentance and fosters holiness of life. Through these means, not only are the destructive forces of sin vanquished in our lives, but love is once more inflamed for God and for others. Communion is healed and strengthened. Furthermore, if we are conscious of having committed a mortal sin, we are obliged to confess it in the Sacrament of Penance with true sorrow and a purpose of amendment before receiving Holy Communion. If a grave reason for approaching the Eucharist exists and the opportunity for confession is lacking, we are permitted to receive Holy Communion provided that we first make an act of perfect contrition and resolve to go to Confession as soon as possible thereafter. It should be noted that, while Confession is not required before receiving Holy Communion when one is not conscious of having committed a mortal sin, frequent Confession is strongly encouraged as an aid to growth in holiness. Moreover, the frequent reception of Holy Communion strengthens us against temptation and sin and helps us cultivate a life of virtue.

- c. Proximate preparation — How we get ready for the Mass. It includes:
- i. *Prayerful recollection* — We should prayerfully recollect ourselves prior to coming to Mass. We should strive to arrive on time, allowing ourselves to prepare our minds and hearts for the liturgy. Upon entering the church, we should maintain reverent silence so that we and those around us are able to pray before Mass begins. This will ensure that we are at peace within ourselves and with others. Such recollection helps to eliminate distractions and allows us to focus more easily on the great mystery of the Eucharistic celebration in which we are about to participate. A prayerful and reflective reading of the Scripture selections for the Mass of the day will help make our hearts and minds ready to receive God’s Word more deeply.
 - ii. *The Eucharistic fast* — We are required to keep the Eucharistic fast, that is, refraining from food and drink (except for water and medicines) for at least one hour prior to receiving Holy Communion. This fast demonstrates reverence and respect for the Body and Blood of Christ that we are going to receive. It also teaches us to hunger for Jesus in Holy Communion.
 - iii. *Appropriate attire* — We should also come to the sacred liturgy appropriately dressed. As Christians we should dress in a modest manner, wearing clothes that reflect our reverence for God and that manifest our respect for the dignity of the liturgy and for one another.
- d. “Immediate preparation” — How we “attentively participate” in the Mass.
- i. *Active participation* — Because the celebration of the Eucharist is the source and summit of the entire Christian life, nothing is more important than participating in the Mass with our whole hearts and minds and bodies. One with the priest and with all the Church, we join ourselves to the perfect sacrifice of Christ through prayer, song, silence, and action.
 - ii. *The penitential rite* — During the opening penitential rite of the Mass, we recognize our sinfulness and confess the mystery of God’s love. This disposes us to participate more worthily in the Eucharistic Mystery of Jesus’ death and Resurrection.
 - iii. *Hearing the Word* — With active minds, we should listen attentively to the proclamation of the Scripture readings and to the homily. As when the Risen Jesus first explained the Scriptures to the disciples on the road to Emmaus before he “broke bread” with them, our hearts must first burn at the hearing of the Word of Truth so as to receive Jesus more fervently in Holy Communion.
 - iv. *The Eucharistic Prayer* — We are to unite ourselves in mindful and heartfelt worship, adoration, praise, and petition with the priest as he prays the Eucharistic Prayer, for he is praying in the person of Christ the Head and on behalf of and in the name of the whole Church. That prayer is an offering of praise and thanksgiving for God’s work of creation and salvation. It is a proclamation in which the Body and Blood of Christ are made present by the power of the Holy Spirit and in which we are joined to Christ in offering sacrifice to God the Father. Our “Amen” at the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer confirms our “yes” to that prayer.
 - v. *The Our Father* — “As proof that you are children, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal 4:6). Through Christ’s atoning death and life-giving Resurrection, we have become adopted sons and daughters of the Father through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and so dare to pray to the Father in the words that Jesus taught us. In this prayer we ask God not only to help us in our need but also to purify us from sin, so that what is holy may be given to those who are holy.
 - vi. *The sign of peace* — Jesus himself exhorted us, “Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5:23-24). This action expresses more than human solidarity and good will. Exchanging the sign of peace prior to receiving Holy Communion highlights that it is as brothers and sisters in Christ that we receive Holy Communion. If we are truly to be made one in him through the Eucharist, we must first be at peace with one another.
 - vii. *Approaching the altar* — We are to approach the altar for Holy Communion with reverence, love, and awe as part of the Eucharistic procession of the faithful. This includes making a reverent bow of the head just before receiving Holy Communion, which expresses both our individual and communal adoration of Jesus in the Eucharist as well as acknowledgment of our belief in the Real Presence of Christ in Holy Communion.
 - viii. *Love and thanksgiving* — During the period of reflective silence following the reception of Holy Communion, we are called to express our love and thanks to Jesus for his mercy and kindness, asking

him to fill us with the life and love of the Holy Spirit so that we may truly give glory to the Father in our lives.

D. Summary and Conclusion

1. The Eucharistic liturgy is "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows."
2. As bishops, in union with all of our priests and deacons, we rejoice with all the Catholic faithful as together we assemble around the altar of the Lord to receive Jesus in Holy Communion. May none of us ever violate or abuse this sacred mystery. May we always approach this holy mystery with due reverence and awe and love for the Holy One of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is in our midst and who comes to abide within us, making us holy as he himself is holy.