

LESSON TWENTY-THIRD.

ON THE END FOR WHICH THE HOLY EUCHARIST WAS INSTITUTED.

251 Q. Why did Christ institute the Holy Eucharist?

A. Christ instituted the Holy Eucharist:

(1) To unite us to Himself and to nourish our souls with His divine life.

(2) To increase sanctifying grace and all the virtues in our souls.

(3) To lessen our evil inclinations.

(4) To be a pledge of everlasting life.

(5) To fit our bodies for a glorious resurrection.

(6) To continue the sacrifice of the cross in His Church.

“To nourish.” The Holy Eucharist does to our souls what natural food does to our bodies. It strengthens them and makes up for the losses we have sustained by sin, etc. “A pledge,” because it does not seem probable that a person who all during life had been fed and nourished with the sacred body of Our Lord should after death be buried in hell. “To fit our bodies,” because Our Lord has promised that if we eat His flesh and drink His blood, that is, receive the Holy Eucharist, He will raise us up on the last day, or day of judgment (St. John vi. 55).

* 252 Q. How are we united to Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist?

A. We are united to Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist by means of holy Communion.

253 Q. What is holy Communion?

A. Holy Communion is the receiving of the body and blood of Christ.

Holy Communion is therefore the receiving of the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist.

254 Q. What is necessary to make a good Communion?

A. To make a good Communion it is necessary to be in a state of sanctifying grace and to be fasting from midnight.

“Midnight”—that is, twelve o’clock at night; but you should not take anything, especially solid food, for a little while before twelve, so as to be sure of the time, and also not to have little particles of food in your mouth after twelve. If you find some little pieces of food in your mouth in the morning, when you are going to holy Communion, spit them out, and your fast will not be broken. One drop of anything taken even in necessity or by mistake after twelve will prevent you from going to holy Communion. What, then, are you to do if, without thinking, you break your fast? Do not go to Communion that morning, but fast from twelve the next night, and go the following morning. But never, never, on any account, go to holy Communion when you have broken your fast. Never let fear or shame or anything else make you do such a thing. It is no shame to break your fast by mistake; but it is a great sin to knowingly go to Communion after breaking your fast.

255 Q. Does he who receives Communion in mortal sin receive the body and blood of Christ?

A. He who receives Communion in mortal sin receives the body and blood of Christ, but does not receive His grace, and he commits a great sacrilege.

“The body and blood,” because the appearance of bread and wine is there after consecration, and he receives it. He who receives the Holy Eucharist in mortal sin receives Our Lord into a filthy soul. If a great and highly-esteemed friend was coming to visit your house, would you not take care to have everything clean and neat, and pleasing to him? And the greater the dignity of the person coming, the more careful you would be. But what are all the persons of dignity in the

world—kings or popes—compared with Our Lord, Who leaves the beauties of heaven to come to visit our soul? and the purest we can make it is not pure enough for Him. But He is kind to us, and is satisfied with our poor preparation if He sees we are doing our very best. But oh, what a shame to receive Him into our soul without any preparation! and more horrible still, to fill it with vile sins, that we know are most disgusting to Him! No wonder, therefore, that receiving holy Communion unworthily is so great a crime, and so deserving of God's punishment. Why should not the heavenly Father punish us for treating His beloved Son with such shameful disrespect and contempt?

* 256 Q. Is it enough to be free from mortal sin, to receive plentifully the graces of holy Communion?

A. To receive plentifully the graces of holy Communion it is not enough to be free from mortal sin, but we should be free from all affection to venial sin, and should make acts of lively faith, of firm hope and ardent love.

* 257 Q. What is the fast necessary for holy Communion?

A. The fast necessary for holy Communion is the abstaining from midnight from everything which is taken as food or drink.

“Food or drink.” If you swallowed a button, for example, it would not break your fast, because it is not food or drink.

* 258 Q. Is any one ever allowed to receive holy Communion when not fasting?

A. Any one in danger of death is allowed to receive Communion when not fasting.

“Not fasting.” But then the holy Communion is called by another name; it is called the Viaticum, and the priest uses a different prayer in giving it to the sick person. When a person dies, he goes, as it were, on a journey from this world to the next. Now, when persons are going on a journey they

must have food to strengthen them. Our Lord wished, therefore, that all His children who had to go on this most important of all journeys—from this world to the next—should be first strengthened by this sacred food, His own body and blood. The Latin word for road or way is *via*, and Viaticum therefore means food for the way. Not only are persons in danger of death allowed to receive when not fasting, but they are obliged to receive ; and the priest is obliged under pain of sin to bring holy Communion to the dying at any hour of the day or night.

When I speak of a great journey from this world to the next, from earth to heaven, you must not understand me to mean that it is a great many miles from earth to heaven, or that it takes a long time to go to the next world. No. We cannot measure the distance, nor does it take time to get there. The instant we die, no matter where that happens, our soul is in the next world, and judged by God.

* 259 Q. When are we bound to receive holy Communion?

A. We are bound to receive holy Communion, under pain of mortal sin, during the Easter time and when in danger of death.

* 260 Q. Is it well to receive holy Communion often?

A. It is well to receive holy Communion often, as nothing is a greater aid to a holy life than often to receive the Author of all graces and the Source of all good.

* 261 Q. What should we do after holy Communion?

A. After holy Communion we should spend some time in adoring Our Lord, in thanking Him for the graces we have received and in asking Him for the blessings we need.