



When we looked at the guidelines for receiving Communion, we noted that there are several circumstances where a person might not be able to receive Jesus truly present in the Blessed Sacrament, such as someone who doesn't share the Catholic faith or belief in the gift of Jesus in the Eucharist; someone who does believe but is unable to receive because of illness; someone who is living outside the moral teaching of the Church; or someone who needs to partake of the Sacrament of Reconciliation before receiving Communion. For many in these situations, abstaining from receiving the Holy Eucharist can be a great sacrifice. What should we do when we aren't able to receive the greatest possible gift in the world?

In the "Source and Summit of the Christian life," we encounter Jesus, God with us, who offers us the greatest gift we could ever receive: himself. Without question, not being able to receive Communion can be an incredible challenge and sacrifice. The fact that this is a hard sacrifice is a good thing! The difficulty shows us where our hearts really are and that we understand the truth of the Eucharist. If we didn't believe Jesus was really present, this sacrifice wouldn't be nearly as hard to offer. Besides the genuine reverence we show for the sacrament, not being able to receive can offer us a unique opportunity to become even more aware of God's presence in our lives and his call for us to turn away from sin and allow his grace to work in our lives. For those who are longing for the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, this time also offers the opportunity to practice making a "**Spiritual Communion**" to unite with Jesus in the Eucharist.

### **What Spiritual Communion Is**

What is Spiritual Communion? As the *Guidelines for Reception of Holy Communion* state: "All who are not receiving Holy Communion are encouraged to express in their hearts a prayerful desire for unity with the Lord Jesus and with one another" (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1996). This practice is called a *Spiritual Communion*. While reception of Holy Communion is incredibly significant and our fullest participation in the Mass, those who are not able to receive the Eucharist sacramentally can unite themselves spiritually to Christ through prayer. We can still pray and thank God in that moment for the wonderful love of Jesus and his saving sacrifice. We can acknowledge through prayer that we believe Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist. We can express true longing from our hearts that we will be able to receive the Eucharist in the future. We can express the desire in the moment of being able to receive graces from Jesus in the Eucharist, even though we are unable to receive him sacramentally. So, those who cannot receive Communion can still gain spiritual fruit from the Mass, uniting themselves to Christ through desire and prayer.

At various times in our Church history, Spiritual Communion was really more the norm than the exception. Many saints lived during eras when reception of Communion was very rare, arising from many factors such as the legality of Christianity, the availability of priests, or a humble sense of unworthiness to receive our Lord. In his book *The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, Fr. Michael Muller talks about spiritual union with the Mass even from a distance: "It is well for those who can do so in the course of the morning to retire to their room nearly at the time which they know to be the hour when the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is being offered in the Church, and, after having implored the grace of God, to perform with recollection and fervor the duty of religion, to kneel down before the Crucifix, and with all the sentiments of devotion possible to unite heart and soul to the Heart of Jesus in the holy Mass, and then read or say the same prayers which they would have said had they been actually present in the church, never forgetting to make the spiritual Communion, which may be made in any place, and at any hour of the day or night" (*The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, p. 392).

### **How to Make a Spiritual Communion**

Spiritual Communion allows us all to be participating in the prayer of the Mass, either from our pew or from a distance. If you are unable to receive the Eucharist, just after the priest receives Communion (at what would be the normal time people come forward for Communion), you can tell Jesus in your heart of your desire to receive him. This can be in your own words or, if you prefer, this commonly known prayer from St. Alphonsus Liguori:

#### ***An Act of Spiritual Communion***

*My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Blessed Sacrament. I love You above all things and I desire You in my soul. Since I cannot now receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though You were already there, I embrace You and unite myself wholly to You. Let me not be ever separated from You. Amen.*

Our faith tells us that, by the grace of Christ, we will navigate the challenges of our lives. Let's unite ourselves in mind and heart to Jesus this day, trusting in him and his love for us!