

DISPOSITIONS FOR HOLY COMMUNION

Sermon by [Rev. Msgr. Vincent Nicholas Foy](#) (August 14, 1915 – March 13, 2017)

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Part 1 Introduction

My dear brethren, we all recognize the value of reviews. Our memories are faltering and failing faculties need constantly to be refreshed. Most of us have forgotten many of the poems we memorized at school; we have forgotten a great deal of the algebra, geometry, physics, and other subjects of high school. It is the same with our religious instruction. We have forgotten many of the catechism answers which once came so readily to our lips. It is therefore useful to us to continually review the principles of our faith, to impress them ever more deeply in the grooves of our minds. To widen the grooves by wider spiritual reading and reflection, for the doctrines of our faith and the principles of the spiritual life are the really important guides in our lives.

This evening, we will open up our catechism, as it were, and reflect upon one of the questions explained to us long ago. The question was asked in our catechism: “How must we be prepared for Holy Communion?”

What could be more important to our spiritual life than the answer to this question?

In the Blessed Eucharist we have the true manna and bread from heaven, sometimes called the Bread of angels. When properly received Holy Communion brings a surging of new life to the soul through an increase of **sanctifying grace**, the greatest treasure we can possess next to the state of grace itself. **It unites us to God** in the most intimate way possible in this life, as one saint says, more closely than two pieces of wax which when melted become one. **It strengthens us mightily against the temptations** which would ravage our souls and leave them without God. It promotes the virtues which make up the image of Christ. **It is a pledge** of our future glory and eternal life.

There are the fruits when it is properly received.

It is therefore a great and important question which our catechism asked and answered: “How must we be prepared for Holy Communion?”

Part 2: The Necessary Dispositions

When we answer this question, we find there are two parts of it. One part gives us the **necessary** dispositions for Holy Communion. The other part gives us the **desirable** dispositions.

The first necessary disposition is that we must be in the state of grace. The Holy Eucharist is what is called a **sacrament of the living**, for those already united to God by the state of grace, the bond of charity. Food is not for the dead, it is for the living. The soul in the fetters of sin is a dead soul. Sin changes what should be spiritual food into spiritual poison. The Bread of Life becomes the Bread of Death. St. Paul reminds us: “He who eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks judgment to himself.”

It is true that a person in the state of mortal sin may gain the state of grace by an act of perfect contrition, i.e. an act of contrition made from the love of God, plus the intention of going to Confession as soon as conveniently possible. However, such a person may still not receive Holy Communion until absolved in the sacrament of penance.

The second necessary disposition is that **we must know and realize what we receive in Holy Communion**. We must **know and realize** it is Jesus Christ we take into our hearts. Thus, children who have not the use of reason may not receive. Nor may the insane receive Holy Communion. Nor may the sick who have lapsed into unconsciousness or cannot appreciate that the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ.

[2025 note of typist: This Latin rite sermon was preached in 1958. In the Eastern rite, infants may receive all of the sacraments of initiation - Baptism, Communion and Confirmation. Later on, parents may withhold their children from receiving the Eucharist until after they make their First Confession at the age of reason. For example, a local custom in Byzantine Catholic schools is to follow the Latin rite by not having Grade 1 and 2 students receiving Holy Communion, until they after their First Confession in Grade 2. Perhaps in the Latin rite there are concerns with infants vomiting or burping up Holy Communion, or that children can commit mortal sin before they receive their First Confession?]

The third necessary disposition is that we must be fasting according to the laws of the Church. Exceptions of course must be made for the reception of Holy Viaticum by the dying and in extraordinary cases, e.g. to avoid the profanation or desecration of the Eucharist.

Ordinarily, one must be fasting. To promote more frequent Holy Communion the laws of the Eucharistic Fast have undergone radical changes in the last few years, first in 1953 by the Apostolic Constitution “Christus Dominus” and then in 1957 on March 19, by the Moto Proprio of Pope Pius XII called “Sacram Communionem”.

The old law of fasting from midnight we know has been abolished.

We now compute the time of fast from the moment of receiving Holy Communion. A three-hour fast, counting back from the moment of Communion must be kept with regard to solid food and alcoholic liquids. A one hour fast, counting back from the moment of Communion, must be kept with regards to all liquid nourishment. Water never breaks the fast. Every reception of Holy Communion is regulated by the above laws, whether it is received in the morning, evening or at midnight.

There are special privileges for the sick, even though they are not bedridden. The sick must, like others, observe the three-hour fast from solid nourishment. However, true medicine, may be taken either in liquid or solid form, at anytime before Holy Communion. Likewise, the sick may take non-alcoholic liquid nourishment anytime, prior to Holy Communion. Again, water never breaks the fast. In the new legislation, no permission or consultation of the Confessor is required in order to avail oneself of these concessions. However, we should not forget that the Holy Father urged all who felt able, to observe the old Eucharistic laws of fast. If one does not do so, he should try to compensate in other ways, especially by works of penance and charity.

Part 3: Desirable Disposition - Preparation

Now we come to the dispositions for Holy Communion which cannot be called necessary, but which are most important for the fruitful reception of Holy Communion. These may be summed up under two headings: Preparation and Thanksgiving.

We can readily see the necessity and the propriety of preparing our souls to receive our Creator in a fitting manner.

Moses had the Ark of the Covenant built from the most precious wood and had it plated with gold. Why? Because it was to contain the two tablets of the Lord, which had come from God - the two tablets of the Ten Commandments.

For seven years Solomon and workers labored in the construction of the Temple of Jerusalem, choosing only precious wood, marble and stone, and lavishing gold upon the walls. Some question this saying: "Why such extravagance?" Solomon's reply was: "I am building a house not for man but for God."

If such care was bestowed upon preparing the Ark of the Covenant and upon the Temple of Jerusalem, what about our souls? When we receive Holy Communion, we receive the Living God. We become Living Arks and Living Tabernacles. For this privilege we should prepare ourselves.

How do we prepare? We do so by ... exercising the virtues which are in the soul in the state of grace, by making acts of Faith, Hope, Charity, humility, and sorrow. **We make an act of Faith** when we say: "Lord I believe." The Eucharist is the "Mystery of Faith." Our faith can never be too great. We must repent "I believe Lord, increase my faith." **We make an act of hope** for the graces that Christ has promised to those who eat His flesh and drink His Blood. We make an act of love by making our own the words of Saint Peter: "Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." The Eucharist is the sacrament of love. It is God's great proof of His love and inspires in us a love in return. **We make an act of humility** when we acknowledge that of ourselves, we have nothing but sin to our name and that all that is good in us and around us comes from the All Holy God we are to receive. So we say with the priest: "Lord I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof but only say the word and my soul shall be healed." We make an act of sorrow for sin when we recite the Confiteor with the priest: when we make an act of contrition and ask Christ in the words of the Psalmist: "Create a clean heart in me, Oh God."

So should we prepare to receive Our God with the tabernacle of our heart: in faith, hope, charity, humility, and compunction.

Part 4: Desirable Disposition – Thanksgiving

The other important disposition for Holy Communion is a suitable Thanksgiving. The time after Holy Communion, when we have within us the Divine Guest, is the most fruitful and beneficial. We should profit by these moments.

How do we go about making our Thanksgiving? In a way parallel to our preparation for Communion. We should unite with Our Blessed Mother, with the Angels and Saints in adoring Christ present within us.

We must thank Our Divine Guest for coming to spend these minutes with us, minutes so rich in goodness and sanctification.

We should express our love for Him who sanctified Himself for our salvation.

We should beg His graces, because Christ in Holy Communion comes laden with all the treasures of His divinity and comes in willingness to bestow these upon us. With humility, confidence and hope we should request a sharing in these.

We should make resolutions for the future, to progress in virtue and to adhere ever more firmly to God's Will and Commandments. For our preparation for Communion and our Thanksgiving we may use books. These however, must never supplant the interior acts of devotion - for upon these really depend the fitting reception of our Lord.

Part 5: Conclusion

So my dear brethren we have reviewed the question: "How must we be prepared for Holy Communion?"

We realize how important Holy Communion is in our lives. Napoleon, who wandered far from the orbit of God's Will in his day, when he was at the height of his influence once asked his generals: "Do you know what was the happiest day of my life?" One general replied: "It was the uniting at marriage." Another said: "It was the battle of the pyramids." A third replied: "It was the glamorous meeting at Austerlitz." Napoleon replied in a loud voice: "No it was the day of my First Holy Communion." And we know that when at last God's hand punished Napoleon's pride and he was in prison on the island of St. Helena, he prepared children for their First Holy Communion.

How many of us look back in the day of our first Holy Communion on the happy as the happiest day of our lives!

In our pilgrimage through this life, if we gaze with the eyes of faith, we see that the really great moments in our lives, above all others, standing like mountains against the valleys, were the moments when we were one with Christ Our God in Holy Communion. For these moments provide for us, if we are there properly, the greatest opportunities for **fixing in us the path of God's will**, for **taking giant steps in charity**, and for **sealing our salvation**. Holy Communion is the pledge of our future glory.

“Your fathers did eat manna in the desert” said Christ, “and are dead. “But if any man eat of the bread that I shall give he shall live forever.”

May these thoughts stir us to reap the fruits of Holy Communion by receiving it with the necessary dispositions and with proper preparation and thanksgiving.

Amen.

This handwritten sermon was typed for the first time by the [APOSTOLATE OF EUCHARISTIC ADORATION](http://www.perpetualeucharisticadoration.com) www.perpetualeucharisticadoration.com, on August 11, 2025, in commemoration of +Msgr. Vincent Foy’s birthday on August 14.

His handwritten notes can be viewed on his website [MSGR. VINCENT FOY – Selected Writings of Msgr. Vincent Nicholas Foy at this link HERE](#).

After a long day working at the chancery offices, Msgr. Foy would travel far to be the guest preacher at Forty Hour devotions with exposition at parishes. He was a co-founder and director of [this charity](#), which assists parishes with expanding Eucharistic and perpetual adoration. Msgr. Foy is known as the longest ordained and oldest diocesan priest in the history of the Archdiocese of Toronto and the longest ordained Anglophone diocesan priest in the history of Canada. Worldwide, four served longer.