

# **Communion in Quarantine: A Way to Pray**

*By Seminarian Alexander Elfreich*

The coronavirus pandemic has made a “Mass impact,” so to speak, on our life of faith. The bishops of Ohio have announced the suspension of all public Masses and public liturgies through Holy Week and Easter Sunday. Even though the measures taken for our health and safety have altered our normal spiritual pattern of life, we are not left without spiritual resources to nourish us in the days ahead. I want to especially highlight the practice of making a “*spiritual communion*.”

## **A Prayer for Our Times**

The exercise of making a “spiritual communion” is not only relevant to our situation but helps us live like the saints! This is not the first time in history when people were unable to go to Mass because of circumstances beyond their control. In the early days of Christianity, Saint Paul was imprisoned multiple times. We can bet that he wasn’t let out for Mass or allowed to receive Communion. And all the way up through the 20th century, war or disease or other factors prevented people from attending Mass. But they still wanted to do something to acknowledge the Lord’s Day. And thus developed the tradition of making a “spiritual communion.” When someone was unable to go to Mass and receive Communion sacramentally (in the consecrated host), they would offer up a special prayer to acknowledge their belief in the importance of Mass and Communion, and ask for the graces that come from being united to Jesus in the Eucharist.

In other words, making a spiritual communion is a way to be united to Jesus like we would if we were at Mass and received Communion in a state of grace.

## **What the Saints Say**

How is this possible? Saint Thomas Aquinas gave some thought to this. Here’s the way he explains it. When it comes to receiving Communion, there’s a distinction between “sacramental eating” and “spiritual eating.” *Sacramental eating* refers to the physical act of eating the consecrated host. *Spiritual eating* means receiving all the graces from the act of receiving Communion. Normally you have both together. But can you have spiritual eating without the sacramental eating? Aquinas says yes, it can happen! He says if you’re unable to receive Communion because of circumstances beyond your control, *the sincere desire to receive it like you normally would can bring graces to you.*

God is very good to us and understands our circumstances. He also knows the desires of your heart. If you sincerely express to Him your desire to be united with Him in Communion, He will not ignore that. The saints understood this. Saint John Paul II said that spiritual communion “has been a wonderful part of Catholic life for centuries and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life.”

One of those saints was Teresa of Avila. There was no television back in her day, but her advice to her religious sisters applies perfectly to watching a televised Sunday Mass!

She says: “When you do not receive Communion, daughters, but hear Mass, you can make a spiritual communion.... If we prepare ourselves [as if we were] to receive Him, He never fails to give in many ways which we do not understand. It is like approaching a fire... If the soul is disposed (I

mean, if it wants to get warm), and if it remains there for a while, it will stay warm for many hours.”

### **A Practical Guide**

At the bottom of this page, you will find a step-by-step process you can use for making a spiritual communion. Just remember to be attentive and focused when you pray it, like you would at Mass. If you are watching a taped Mass, you can say the Prayer for Spiritual Communion during Communion time.

You might also begin your spiritual communion by looking at the daily Mass readings. One way to find them is to Google “Daily Mass readings” and click on the link to

the USCCB website (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops). I sometimes use an app on my phone called “Laudate” to look up the Daily Readings for Mass. You can read through the readings, take a few moments to reflect on anything that stuck out to you from them, and then continue with an Act of Faith.

Even though we’re unable to gather together physically as a community of faith, we remain united in our prayers for each other and for the world. God will continue to give us what we need. We need only ask! And as Saint Teresa of Avila encouraged her sisters, may you find warmth and peace in drawing near to the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus in prayer.

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### **Making a Spiritual Communion**

1. Make an Act of Faith (like the Apostle’s Creed) and express your belief in the presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.
2. Tell Jesus your desire to receive Him in Communion, and to be united with Him in your heart.
3. Ask Jesus for the graces that come from receiving the Eucharist.
4. Pray the Prayer for Spiritual Communion.

### **Prayer for Spiritual Communion**

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.

