

What is there to say about the great purity of soul with which the saints approached to receive the bread of Angels? We know that they had a great delicacy of conscience which was truly angelic. Aware of their own misery, they tried to present themselves to Jesus "holy and immaculate," (Eph. 1:4) repeating with the Republican, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13), and having recourse with great care to the cleansing of Confession.

When St. Jerome was brought Holy Viaticum at the end of his life, the Saint prostrated himself on the ground in adoration and he was heard to repeat with profound humility the words of St. Elizabeth and those of St. Pete, "How is this, that my Lord should come to me?" "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). And how many times was the angelic and seraphic St. Gemma tempted to not receive Holy Communion, holding herself to be nothing else than a vile dunghill!"

Padre Pio of Pietrelcina used to repeat with trepidation to his brethren, "God sees blights even in the angels. What must He see in me!" For this reason he was very diligent in making his sacramental Confessions.

"Oh, if we could only understand Who is that God Whom we receive in Holy Communion, then what purity of heart we would bring to Him!" exclaimed St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi.

For this reason St. Hugh, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Francis de Sales, St. Ignatius, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Francis Borgia, St. Louis Bertrand, St. Joseph Cupertino, St. Leonard of Port Maurice and many other saints went to Confession every day before celebrating Holy Mass.

St. Camillus de Lellis never celebrated Holy Mass without first going to Confession, because he wanted at least "to dust off" his soul. Once, at sundown in a public square in Livorno, before taking leave of a priest of the same religious order, foreseeing that he would not have a priest to confess to on the following morning before his Mass, paused, took off his hat, made the sign of the Cross and went to Confession right there in the square to his confrere.

Also St. Alphonsus, St. Joseph Cafasso, St. John Bosco, St. Pius X, and Padre Pio of Pietrelcina went to Confession very often. And why did St. Pius X wish to lower the age for First Holy Communion to seven years, if not to allow Jesus to enter into the innocent hearts of children, which are so similar to angels. And why was Padre Pio so delighted when they brought him children five years old who were prepared for First Holy Communion?

The saints applied to perfection the directive of the Holy Spirit, "Let everyone first examine himself, and then eat of that Bread and drink of that Chalice; because he who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks unto his own condemnation" (1Cor. 11:28-29).

To examine themselves, to repent, to accuse themselves in Confession and to ask pardon of God, and in this way even every day profit from the Sacrament of Confession, was something natural for the saints. How fortunate they were to be capable of so much! The fruits of sanctification were constant and abundant because the purity of soul with which each saint welcomed into himself Jesus, "the Wheat of the elect," (Zach. 9:17) was like the good ground "... which brings forth fruit in patience" (Luke 8:15).

St. Anthony Mary Claret illustrates this fact very well: "When we go to Holy Communion, all of us receive the same Lord Jesus, but not all receive the same grace nor are the same effects produced in all. This comes from our greater or lesser disposition. To explain this fact, I will take an example from nature. Consider the process of grafting, the more similar the one plant is to the other, the better the graft will succeed. Likewise, the more resemblance there is between the one that goes to Communion and Jesus, so much the better will the fruits of Holy Communion be." The Sacrament of Confession is in fact the excellent means whereby the similarity between the soul and Jesus is restored.

For this reason St. Francis de Sales taught his spiritual children "Go to Confession with humility and devotion ... if it is possible, every time that you go to Holy Communion, even though you do not feel in your conscience any remorse of mortal sin."

In this regard it is well to recall the teaching of the Church. Holy Communion must be received only while one is in the grace of God. Therefore, when one has committed a mortal sin, even if one has repented of it and has a great desire to receive Holy Communion, it is necessary and indispensable to confess oneself first before receiving Holy Communion, otherwise one commits a most grave sin of sacrilege, for which Jesus said to St. Bridget, "there does not exist on earth a punishment which is great enough to punish it sufficiently!"

St. Ambrose said that persons who commit this sacrilege "come into church with a few sins, and leave it burdened with many." St. Cyril wrote something yet stronger: "They who make a sacrilegious Communion receive Satan and Jesus Christ into their hearts - Satan, that they may let him rule, and Jesus Christ, that they may offer Him in sacrifice as a Victim to Satan."

Thus the Catechism of the Council of Trent (De Euch., v.i) declares: "As of all the sacred mysteries... none can compare with the ... Eucharist, so likewise for no crime is there heavier punishment to be feared from God than for the unholy or irreligious use by the faithful of that which ... contains the very Author and Source of holiness."

On the other hand, Confession made before Holy Communion to render a soul already in the state of Sanctifying Grace more pure and more beautiful, is something precious even though not required. It is precious because it clothes the soul with a more beautiful "wedding garment" (cf Matt. 22:12) with which it may take its place at the table of the angels.

For this reason the most conscientious souls have always made frequent use (at least one a week) of the sacramental cleansing of absolution, even for venial sins. If you want great purity of soul in order to receive Jesus, no purity shines brighter than that which one obtains when he makes a good confession, where the cleansing Blood of Jesus renders the repentant soul divinely bright and beautiful. "The soul that receives the Divine Blood becomes beautiful, as being clothed in a more precious garment, and it appears so beautiful aglow that if you could see it you would be tempted to adore it," declared St. Magdalen di Pazzi.

*A holy person recently said, "Perhaps we should begin reminding people publicly before Mass not to receive the Holy Communion if they think they are in the state of mortal sin." The typist of this paper cannot agree with it more, if it is done diplomatically. In conscience, do we not have the heavy yet noble responsibility to protect and serve Our Lord and Saviour -- our dearest Friend -- who has become unspeakably vulnerable to our sacrilegious Communion?

Let us not forget what St. Cyril said above: "They who make a sacrilegious Communion receive Satan and Jesus Christ into their hearts - Satan, that they may let him rule, and Jesus Christ, that they may offer Him in sacrifice as a Victim to Satan." We too have to be merciful and protect those in the state of serious sin not to become even worse, as the Lord said above to St. Bridget, "there does not exist on earth a punishment which is great enough to punish it sufficiently!"