

# Why Can't Non-Catholics Receive Communion?

**Q - Why can't non-Catholics receive Holy Communion? What if they say that they believe that it is the Body and Blood of Jesus like we do? What should we say to them?**

**A** - Thanks for the question. There are several reasons that non-Catholics cannot receive Communion in the Catholic Church. But, first we must deal with some myths about this topic. It isn't a judgment about anyone's salvation nor is it about how sincere someone may believe in Christ.

Here is what the Catholic Church teaches about The Eucharist and why it is so important. From John 6:53-56.

*"So Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."*

This is the first teaching of Christ on the Eucharist. He clearly states (again and again in John 6) that the Eucharist is not just a symbol of his Body and Blood, but truly becomes his body and blood. Otherwise it would make no sense for his followers to understand him literally (John 6:41 & 6:52) and then walk away from him (John 6:66) without Jesus clearly explaining that he was speaking figuratively.

Then we have the last supper accounts in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Here Christ clearly teaches that the bread and wine are transformed into his body and blood ("this IS my body" & "this IS my blood"). Taken along with Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 11:27-30:

*"Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill and some have died."*

It all adds up. The Catholic Church has consistently taught, through 2,000 years, that Christ is truly present - body, blood, soul, and divinity - in the Eucharist.

Therefore, to receive him in Communion is an outward statement of our unity of faith. It says, in the action of the congregation, that we are united (communing together) to one another in believing in all the Catholic church believes, teaches, and confesses. Those who are not Catholic cannot make such a statement, because they are not fully in communion with us. So, for a non-Catholic to receive Communion is a counter-sign to the truth. It says outwardly "we are one", when we are not. It would be a lie, spoken through actions.

To receive the Eucharist does not only mean we believe in it, but in all that the Catholic Church holds to be true. It says with the body "I am Catholic and hold all that the Church teaches to be true as truth and I therefore unite myself to Jesus and all his Catholic Church, through the bonds made in the Eucharist."

A non-Catholic should be told exactly what we believe. Most do not share our belief in the Eucharist. If they don't, then they probably won't want to receive if explained as I did above. But, what if a non-Catholic says they share a belief in the Eucharist? I suggest you invite them to join us at Communion - but only after they enter the Church through Confirmation (and baptism if necessary). If one truly believes in the Eucharist, then the only place to receive it is in the Catholic Church or the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Why wouldn't you join if you truly believe we have the Eucharist?

Furthermore, the Church limits communion to Catholics out of concern for their spiritual well-being. Paul tells us why in the 1 Cor. verse quoted above. To receive without discerning the body and blood, is to receive condemnation. This would put someone in spiritual danger and we do not want that for another!

The ancient Christians held to the same belief we do now. Here are a few examples:

*"Take note of those who hold heterodox opinions on the grace of Jesus Christ which has come to us, and see how contrary their opinions are to the mind of God....They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, flesh which suffered for our sins and which that Father, in his goodness, raised up again. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes" - Ignatius of Antioch, circa 110 AD.*

*"We call this food Eucharist, and no one else is permitted to partake of it, except one who believes our teaching to be true and who has been washed in the washing which is for the remission of sins and for regeneration and is thereby living as Christ enjoined. For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nurtured, is both the flesh and the blood of that incarnated Jesus" Justin Martyr, circa 151 AD*

Lastly, the Church has no right to change the clear teaching of Christ. We must always be faithful to his teaching, even when others are offended (even when we are not trying to offend, sometimes it happens). We are not trying to be exclusive, but honest and faithful to Christ.

Remember this, not all Catholics can receive Communion, but only those in full communion with the Church and those in the state of grace (no un-confessed mortal sins).

Here is the US Bishops statement on the issue that you can find on the back of most missalettes.

### **For Catholics**

As Catholics, we fully participate in the celebration of the Eucharist when we receive Holy Communion. We are encouraged to receive Communion devoutly and frequently. In order to be properly disposed to receive Communion, participants should not be conscious of grave sin and normally should have fasted for one hour. A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord without prior sacramental confession except for a grave reason where there is no opportunity for confession. In this case, the person is to be mindful of the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, including the intention of confessing as soon as possible (canon 916). A frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance is encouraged for all.

### **For our fellow Christians**

We welcome our fellow Christians to this celebration of the Eucharist as our brothers and sisters. We pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit in this Eucharist will draw us closer to one another and begin to dispel the sad divisions which separate us. We pray that these will lessen and finally disappear, in keeping with Christ's prayer for us "that they may all be one" (Jn 17:21).

Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life, and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to Holy Communion. Eucharistic sharing in exceptional circumstances by other Christians requires permission according to the directives of the diocesan bishop and the provisions of canon law (canon 844 § 4). Members of the Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Polish National Catholic Church are urged to respect the discipline of their own Churches. According to Roman Catholic discipline, the Code of Canon Law does not object to the reception of communion by Christians of these Churches (canon 844 § 3).

### **For those not receiving Holy Communion**

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.

### **For non-Christians**

We also welcome to this celebration those who do not share our faith in Jesus Christ. While we cannot admit them to Holy Communion, we ask them to offer their prayers for the peace and the unity of the human family.

(Adapted from Aggie Catholic blog, St. Mary's Catholic Center, College Station, Texas: <https://www.aggiecatholic.org/blog/2014/06/why-cant-non-catholics-receive-communion#:~:text=Because%20Catholics%20believe%20that%20the,not%20admitted%20to%20Holy%20Communion.>)