

September 3, 2017

Heart of the World XXXVIII

For the last few weeks, we have been looking at how we arrived at the current practice of receiving Holy Communion on the tongue *or* in the hand. I mentioned last week how the pastor of my parish growing up instituted the practice of Communion in the hand somewhat begrudgingly.

His reticence may not be simply over looked by slapping any kind of ideological label on him, however. He was actually at Vatican II as an advisor to Cardinal Cushing and was very well informed not just of the conclusions, but the debates. What is even less known (or more properly, remembered) is that the practice of Communion in the hand was not even recommended, much less decreed by the Council Fathers.

While the Liturgical Movement's principle of *resourcement* was very influential of the liturgical reforms that were called for, this practice was not part of the proposed 'changes'. So, where *did* it come from?

This practice (receiving in the hand) first began to spread in any significance in parts of Europe during the early 1960's. It was simply done—without any input from Rome or the wider Church. Local parishes just started doing it and local bishops either authorized it or knowingly ignored it. The big problem was that they did not have the authority to do so.

Because of the chaos that was ensuing, Pope Paul VI surveyed the bishops throughout the world to solicit their opinions and based on their very clear response, on May 28, 1969 the Congregation for Divine Worship issued a document. This document (*Memoriale Domini*) stated: "From the responses received, it is thus clear that by far the greater number of bishops feel that the present discipline (**that is on the tongue*) should not be changed at all, indeed that if it were changed, this would be offensive to the sensibility and spiritual appreciation of these bishops and of most of the faithful."

Despite this clear opinion of the world's bishops, later in 1969, the Holy Father decided to strike a compromise between the general opinion throughout the world (as expressed in *Memoriale Domini*) and the few 'revolutionaries' in continental Europe. Given "the gravity of the matter," the pope would not authorize Communion in the hand, however, he did offer to bestow an indult (an exception to the law) temporarily allowing it, provided that some conditions were met.

The first condition was that this indult could not be given to a country in which Communion in the hand was not an already established practice. Second, the bishops in countries where it was established must approve of the practice "by a secret vote and with a two-thirds majority."

He also instituted seven regulations. More on that next week.

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