

Heart of the World XLI

In #1324, the Catechism of the Catholic Church quotes from a document of Vatican II where it explains that like the heart in the body, the very center and life-moving force of the Church is the Eucharist—the Heart of the World. This year (2017) also marks the 100th Anniversary of the appearance of Our Lady to the three children (Lucia, Jacinta, and Francisco) at Fatima.

With Our Lady's messages and the prayers the Angel taught the children as a backdrop, we have been looking at how we arrived at the current practice of receiving Holy Communion on the tongue or in the hand.

Over the last two weeks we looked at the seven regulations that Pope Paul VI required when he issued the temporary indult (an exception to the law) allowing Communion in the hand with two fundamental conditions: (1) this indult could not be given to a country in which Communion in the hand was not an already established practice. (2) the bishops in countries where it was established must approve of the practice "by a secret vote and with a two-thirds majority".

Interestingly, #1 was largely ignored throughout the world. There was no established practice in our country, for example, yet the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (now called the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops—USCCB) took up the idea in the mid '70's. The first two rounds of votes (in '75 and '76) failed to garner the required two-thirds majority. The idea was strongly debated pro and con during '77. There was also a little playing around with parliamentary procedures. For instance, a small group of bishops thought it was a little strange that it was being debated at all. Our country was not eligible under the 1st condition since it was not an already established practice in the US.

Somehow this was ignored and a poll of all bishops (including absentee's and those who were retired or did not otherwise have pastoral assignments administering a diocese) was taken. This did get the two-thirds requirement by a slim margin. However, the vote was not supposed to be extended to those who were not directly responsible for pastoring souls in a diocese.

At any rate, as of June 17th, 1977, Communion in the hand has been an authorized practice in the United States. So, what can we conclude? According to the conditions of the indult that Paul VI issued, in most places in the world the establishment of the practice of Communion in the hand is legally dubious—including in our country. His seven regulations, most of which were to preserve and foster belief in Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, have been largely ignored and belief has plummeted and abuses have become rampant.

Does this mean receiving Communion in hand is evil..? No. Conclusions next week.