

Heart of the World XLII

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.

Last week we clearly saw that receiving Communion in the hand is of dubious legal origins. While St. Cyril of Jerusalem is universally cited as promoting it as a normative practice as early as the 4th Century, it is also clear that as time progressed and experience increased, it stopped.

The development of doctrine and practice is a very important idea and the formulation of how that works was John Henry Newman's major contribution to theology. It is critical not to overlook that these developments are a function of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Church. In the Gospel of John, for instance, Jesus promises the Spirit's direction, understanding, and protection numerous times in the Last Supper—especially in ch's 14, 16, and also incorporated into Jesus' High Priestly Prayer in 17.

The fact of the matter is that Communion in the hand is an approved practice and we may utilize it with clear conscience. However, it was strongly opposed by the vast majority of the bishops of the world at the time. Why?

The development of only receiving kneeling and on the tongue is frequently dismissed as being power or ideologically driven by an attitude of clericalism. It isn't. It is very practical and we have forgotten why. Do you remember when we considered the Angel's prayer: "*...in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges, and indifference...*"?

The objection of the world's bishops revolved around a lessening of reverence and understanding of what (Who!) the Eucharist is. Paul VI's conditions specifically addressed that as something to be protected against. Well, the statistics are clear. They knew what they were talking about.

As I have prayed about this, all the practicalities of abuses aside, the understanding that the Lord has shown me regards the psychology of 'taking' vs. 'receiving'. It is not that receiving on the hand is inherently bad, but it does require us to make a gesture of 'taking'—feeding ourselves. The gift of God in the Eucharist is beyond anything imaginable. Something unobtainable without His Gift. When we interject ourselves into the reception of it, we can inadvertently devalue it.

Fr. Michael