

REFLECTIONS ON CHURCH TEACHING AND DIOCESAN POLICY REGARDING RECEPTION OF THE EUCHARIST

Bishop DiLorenzo sometimes receives questions regarding the proper disposition for receiving the Eucharist and the appropriateness of denying reception of the Eucharist under certain circumstances. On the wider national level, similar questions continue to surface from time to time, especially in relation to Catholic politicians. On behalf of the Bishop, the Office of the Diocesan Theologian would like to take this opportunity to review the Church's teaching on these matters.

The Proper Disposition for Reception of the Eucharist.

Regarding the Church's teaching on reception of the Eucharist, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#1385) states:

To respond to this invitation we must *prepare ourselves* for so great and so holy a moment. St. Paul urges us to examine our conscience: '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 anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself.' (*1 Cor* 11:27-29) Anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion.

Accordingly, it is the duty of every Catholic who wishes to receive Communion to examine his or her conscience thoroughly. The Church teaches that one must be properly disposed to receive the Eucharist, making use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to receiving the Eucharist if a grave sin has been committed. For a sin to be grave (mortal), three conditions must be present: grave matter, full knowledge of the evil of the act, and deliberate consent of the will. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1857)

These principles reflect the generally applicable Church teaching on receiving the Eucharist, and they should always guide the judgments all Catholics must make as they contemplate "so great and so holy a moment."

In 2006, the U.S. bishops further elaborated:

Some Catholics may not fully understand the Church's doctrinal and moral teaching on certain issues. They may have certain questions and even uncertainties. In these situations of honest

doubt and confusion, they are welcome to partake of Holy Communion, as long as they are prayerfully and honestly striving to understand the truth of what the Church professes and are taking appropriate steps to resolve their confusion and doubt. Individuals who experience serious difficulties or doubts about Church teaching should carefully study those Church teachings from authentic sources and seek advice from a confessor or pastor.

If a Catholic in his or her personal or professional life were knowingly and obstinately to reject the defined doctrines of the Church, or knowingly and obstinately to repudiate her definitive teaching on moral issues, however, he or she would seriously diminish his or her communion with the Church. Reception of Holy Communion in such a situation would not accord with the nature of the Eucharistic celebration, so that he or she should refrain. (*Happy Are Those Who Are Called to His Supper: On Preparing to Receive Christ Worthily in the Eucharist, 2006*)

The Church has continually reaffirmed its longstanding conviction that respect for the right to life of every unborn child is one of these fundamental moral teachings.

Questions Regarding Denial of the Eucharist.

Occasionally, the Diocese receives distinct inquiries as to when a bishop should feel obliged to deny the Eucharist to someone who approaches to receive it. Such questions are most frequently asked regarding Catholic politicians who take a “pro-choice” position in the matter of abortion – that is, whose stance is one of permitting abortion to be legal rather than insisting that an unborn child’s intrinsic and inalienable right to life be enshrined in law.

On this question, Bishop DiLorenzo wishes to offer the following reflections:

In 2004, a Task Force on Catholic Bishops and Catholic Politicians, headed by Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, developed key recommendations that were adopted by the U.S. bishops at their June and November meetings that year. Those recommendations highlighted the need to teach clearly, persuade convincingly, and dialogue constructively with Catholics in public life (and the Catholic community at large) on issues central to human life and dignity. In accord with Task Force policies, I take very seriously my duty to maintain vital lines of

communication with public officials who make frequent decisions impacting critical moral and social issues. My brother U.S. bishops and I continue to reach out to our leaders in public life to explain Catholic principles, engage them in dialogue, and urge them to protect human life and dignity in every decision they make. By doing so, we strive to invite, persuade, and exhort the way Jesus did.

Because this dialogue always occurs in private settings, the policy of our Diocese is to avoid commenting on specific situations.

However, I wish to strongly underscore the Church's teaching that it is the duty of each and every Catholic who wishes to receive Communion to examine his or her conscience thoroughly and to then receive the Eucharist only if he or she is not conscious of grave sin, unless that sin has been absolved through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.