

THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST
CORPUS CHRISTI

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS IN THE EUCHARIST

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun
Saturday, June 2, 2018, 5:00 p.m. Mass
Sunday, June 3, 2018, 8:30 and 10:30 a.m. Masses

We are going to start with a **True-False question**.
It is a very **important question** about the **sacraments**.

Here is the question.

Q: Of the seven sacraments, the **ONLY sacrament that forgives our sins**
is the Sacrament of **Reconciliation**. Confession.

True or false?

A: **False**.

There are **seven sacraments**.
Of the seven, not one, but **four**,
confer the **divine gift** of the **forgiveness of sins**.

This **first sacrament of forgiveness** is **Baptism**.

It wipes out Original Sin.

If a person is baptized as an adult, at the time of their baptism,
all of the **sins** of their former life are **cleansed** in the **waters of baptism**,
washed sparkling clean, purified, spotless,
completely and fully in the state of grace.

Before the time of the Sacrament of Reconciliation,
catechumens would wait until just before death to be baptized,
because after Baptism, without Reconciliation,
there was no way to be absolved again
and believers wanted to be forgiven, in the state of grace, and ready to go to heaven.

Obviously the **main sacrament** of the **forgiveness of sins**
is the **Sacrament of Reconciliation**.

We also called is the Sacrament of **Confession** or the Sacrament of **Penance**.

Through Reconciliation, a person receives **sacramental absolution** for **all sins**,
venial sins and **mortal** sins.

Reconciliation is a **Sacrament of Healing**.

The other Sacrament of Healing is the Sacrament of **Anointing**.

It is also called the Sacrament of the **Sick**,
or when a person is close to death, **Extreme Unction**.

When a person is extremely sick, the **ideal** is to go to **confession first**,
and **then** to receive the Sacrament of **Anointing**.

But sometimes a patient is **intubated** (has a breathing tube and cannot speak) or they have **dementia** and cannot think clearly, or they are in **extreme pain** or **highly medicated**, so their **mental capacity** is **compromised**, or they are **unconscious**, all which makes it **impossible** to go to **Confession**.

One of the marvelous **spiritual gifts** of the Sacrament of **Anointing** is that a person's **sins** are **forgiven** ("If they have committed any sins, their sins will be forgiven them" Instruction, *Pastoral Care of the Sick*, No. 155).

This brings us to the **fourth sacrament** that **forgives sins**, and we are discussing this on the Solemnity of Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. So, you guessed it, the fourth sacrament that forgives sins is the **Eucharist**, except, when people hear this, many are surprised, and exclaim, "**I didn't know** that when I go to **Communion**, my **sins are forgiven**."

They are, most of them!

Some sins are forgiven, and **some sins are not** forgiven. So we need to examine this a bit.

The **belief** that our **sins** are **forgiven** in the **reception** of **Holy Communion** comes from **Jesus himself**.

At the Last Supper, when Jesus offered the blessing over the cup of wine, he said, "This is **my blood** ... which will be shed on behalf of many for the **forgiveness of sins**" (Mt 26:28; see Is 53:12c).

The **Precious Blood** of Jesus, **shed** on the **Cross** (see Jn 19:34), the **same Blood** that we at **Holy Communion**, **washes us clean** (see Preface I, Most Holy Eucharist, *Roman Missal*, 440). His Blood washes away the sins of the **world collectively**, and it washes away **your** and **my sins individually**.

St. John wrote in his first letter (c. 95 AD),

"The **blood** of his son **Jesus cleanses us of all sin**" (1 Jn 1:7). It could not be any clearer than this.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), in a homily on *Corpus Christi*, said,

"No other sacrament has greater **healing power**; through it **sins** are **purged away**" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Opusculum* 54, *in festo Corporis Christi*, lect. 1-4).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is equally clear on this:

"Holy Communion **separates us from sin** the Eucharist cannot unite us to Christ without at the same time **cleansing** us from **past sins**" (No. 1393).

We must be very clear about which sins are forgiven.
The Council of Trent in 1551 states that the reception of the Eucharist
“wipes away **venial sins**” (*Catechism*, No. 1394).

So when a person receives Holy Communion,
non-mortal sins are forgiven,
which is a beautiful grace available every time that we receive Communion.

But, “The **Eucharist is not ordered** to the **forgiveness of mortal sins** –
that is **proper** to the **sacrament of Reconciliation**” (*Catechism*, No. 1395).

If a person has committed a **mortal sin**,
a sin that is a **grave offense**,
a sin that **separates** a person **from God** and the **community**,
a mortal sin is **not forgiven** in the reception of Holy Communion.

For a person who has a mortal sin on their soul,
who is not in the state of grace,
the path to Holy Communion is to go to **Confession first**,
and once **absolved** and **restored** to the **state of grace**,
then to go to **Holy Communion**.

This understanding comes from a powerful statement St. Paul made about the Eucharist:
“Whoever **eats** the **bread** or **drinks** the cup of the Lord **unworthily**
will have to **answer for** the **body** and **blood of the Lord**” (1 Cor 11:27).
None of us want to have to do that.

For the average Mass,
most of the people present have **no mortal sins** on their soul.
Yet **every person** in the congregation is a **sinner**.
Yes, everyone, no exceptions.
We **all** have **venial sins** on our souls.
Some are really **small**, **others** are **bigger**, but they are **not mortal**.
If we have **venial sins** on our souls, we are **still in the state of grace**,
and every person in the state of grace is **eligible to receive Holy Communion**.
In fact, every person with venial sins is **encouraged to receive Holy Communion**.

Sometimes people will tell me, “Father, **I don’t feel worthy** to go to Communion.”
And with a naughty twinkle in my eye, I reply,
“You’re right. **You’re not worthy!**”
And then the person will say, “I should **stay away from Communion** then, right?”
And the reply is,
“Absolutely not. It is **all the more reason to go.**”

The person may push me, “Don’t I need to go to **Confession first?**”
Then I need to ask a personal question, “**Any mortal sins?**”
Usually the answer is “No.”

So the final answer is, “It is such a **blessing to go to Communion**, because, **without** even going to **Confession**, **venial sins are forgiven**, when **Jesus comes** to us in his **Body and Blood**.”

Jesus is inviting us to come to Holy Communion.

Jesus **wants to come to us**.

Jesus wants to **wipe away our sins**.

Jesus wants to **fills us** with **his grace**,

and to **help us avoid sins** in the **future**.

St. Thomas Aquinas, in a homily on *Corpus Christi*, said it so well:

“**No other sacrament has greater healing power; through it sins are purged away**”

(St. Thomas Aquinas, *Opusculum 54, in festo Corporis Christi*, lect. 1-4).