

HOLY COMMUNION

IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS

The following letter was written by Fr Michael Romeo to his parishioners at Penola on Sunday 8th March 2020. With his permission we have included it in this week's parish bulletin, as it is a wonderful response to the difficulties we are facing at this time. Please take the time to read it and if you have any concerns please speak with Fr Roman. *Thank you!*

Dear parishioners,

Bishop O'Kelly has issued a letter asking parishes to observe certain temporary protocols in our places of worship. One of the protocols is in regards to the reception of Holy Communion. If you feel that at the moment you would rather not receive Holy Communion for any reason, you may wish to consider a practice in our Catholic tradition known as '**Spiritual Communion.**'

What is 'Spiritual Communion'? St Thomas Aquinas described it as "*an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the most Holy Sacrament and lovingly embrace Him*" at a time or in circumstances when we cannot receive Him in Sacramental Communion. Pope John Paul II encouraged the practice of spiritual communion in his 2003 Encyclical Letter on the Eucharist, **Ecclesia de Eucharistia** which he described as "*a wonderful part of Catholic life for centuries and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life.*"

A Spiritual Communion can be prayed at anytime by an individual who desires to receive Holy Communion at that moment, but in which circumstances prevent them from actually receiving Holy Communion. The impeding circumstances can be varied, for example, the person may have already received Holy Communion twice that day; or

the person may not have fasted for one hour; or the person could be in prison and unable to attend Mass; or the person might be elderly and at home listening to Mass on the radio or watching Mass on the television or online; or the person might have turned up to the wrong Church for Mass at the wrong time. And in times of persecution, Catholics were often unable for long periods to receive Holy Communion in a sacramental way, but they made a Spiritual Communion with much spiritual benefit. In his book, 'Journey towards Easter', Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger discusses how such a practice can be seen as an act of solidarity with those who for various reasons are unable to receive Holy Communion but desire to do so.

Spiritual Communion does not require any special formula or instruction; it only requires the same disposition as the actual reception of the sacrament and a turning to Jesus with one's whole heart. No particular prayer is required, though many Catholic prayer books have various prayers for Spiritual Communion to help focus a proper intention. One of the most popular is that composed by St Alphonsus Liguori which I commend here to you:

“My Jesus,
I believe that you are present in the Blessed Sacrament.
I love you above all things and I desire you with all my heart.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
I embrace you as if you were already in my heart
and unite myself to you completely.
Please do not let me ever be separated from you.
Amen”

I hope that this information may bring some comfort to those who may be distressed by the current protocols.

Yours in Christ.

Fr Michael Romeo PP