

Follow the Saints: Make a Spiritual Communion

The benefits of union with Christ every day.

MARGE FENELON

Paula Magliocco of Pewaukee, Wis., is a busy mother of three and a Catholic elementary-school teacher. Yet, in spite of her hectic life, she finds time to make a spiritual communion, not just once, but several times throughout the day. Why? Because it's easy, takes only a moment, and offers benefits beyond compare.

"Receiving the Eucharist is really the joy of my life, so when I cannot receive sacramentally, I know that the next best way for union with Christ is a spiritual communion," she said. "Jesus is always ready and waiting to unite his heart with ours; and all we need to do is turn to him in prayer, and he is there with his arms wide open and the graces flowing."

A spiritual communion is different from an actual or sacramental communion, in which we receive the Real Presence in the consecrated Host and Precious Blood. A spiritual communion is a devotion that we can initiate on our own, either inside or outside of holy Mass. We can make a spiritual communion at any time and in any place, as long as we approach the devotion with "renewed faith, reverence, humility and in complete trust in the goodness of the divine Redeemer" and are "united to him in the spirit of the most ardent charity," according to Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Mediator Dei* (The Sacred Liturgy). In spiritual communion, we embrace Our Lord as if we had actually received him in the Eucharist.

Redemptorist Father Jim White, who runs the Redemptorist Retreat Center in Oconomowoc, Wis., suggests a four-step method of spiritual communion, one that he himself practices in the footsteps of St. Alphonsus Liguori as a retreat master. First, make an act of faith. This can be one using the formal prayer taught by the Church (see below) or an extemporaneous one. The main point is to express to Our Lord our firm belief in his goodness and mercy and in his real presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Next, make an act of love, again either using the formal prayer of the Church or an extemporaneous one. The act should express our love for Jesus. Then, we express our desire to receive him. Finally, we invite Jesus to come into our hearts spiritually. St. Alphonsus recommended that we even open our mouths as if receiving actual communion.

"This puts us in the state of mind of being in union with Jesus," Father White explained. "It's very simple, it only takes a moment, and we can do it during our work, our studies or anything else we may be doing."

Spiritual communion gives us a greater awareness of God's overall presence in our lives and increases our faith in the Real Presence. So, the more we spiritually communicate, the more united we become with Christ. The Church recommends making spiritual communions as often as possible, even if we're able to participate in Mass that day. It also is advisable to make at least three spiritual communions during Mass: at the beginning, at the consecration and at the end.

Joe Yank attends Mass nearly every day before work at an electrical supply company and prays the Rosary on his drive to work. This, he says, helps to unite him not only with Christ, but also with his Blessed Mother. On the drive home to Hubertus, Wis., from work, he makes a spiritual communion so as to frame his day both actually and spiritually around the Eucharist. Doing so helps to draw him more deeply into the mystery and reality of the Blessed Sacrament.

“I do like to go to daily holy Mass every morning, so I can receive holy Communion sacramentally to start my day. This is a very real help to me, especially when I know I am faced with many difficulties awaiting me at the office,” he said. “But as far as spiritual communions on my drive home, I like to say the Divine Mercy Chaplet. For me, it’s the perfect spiritual communion meditation. ‘Heavenly Father, I offer you the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of your dearly beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ ...’ This helps draw my day into perspective. “

Spiritual communion is valuable, not only for its unity with Jesus and ability to increase our faith in the Eucharist, but for other reasons as well. Whenever we make a spiritual communion, we please God and receive an abundance of his graces. St. Alphonsus taught that the Church grants a partial indulgence of 300 days with every act of spiritual communion and a plenary indulgence once monthly when made under the usual conditions. The *Enchiridion on Indulgences* defines an indulgence as, “the remission before God of the temporal punishment due for sins already forgiven as far as their guilt is concerned.” Indulgences are granted only when the person has a proper disposition and under certain conditions prescribed by the Church. A partial indulgence removes part of the temporal punishment due for sin. A plenary indulgence removes all of the temporal punishment due for sin and, according to the *enchiridion*, must be accompanied by confession, Eucharistic Communion and prayer for the intention of the Pope. The person also must be in the state of grace.

Saints throughout the ages have witnessed to the value of spiritual communion (see their prayers below). In a vision, Our Lord explained it to St. Catherine of Siena by showing her two chalices: one made of gold, the other of silver. He told her that her sacramental Communion was preserved in the gold chalice and that her spiritual communions were in the silver chalice. He told Blessed Jane of the Cross that each time she communicated spiritually, she received graces of the same kind as those received in sacramental Communion.

Blessed Pope John Paul II was a great advocate of spiritual communion. He wrote in his encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (The Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church), “Precisely for this reason, it is good to cultivate in our hearts a constant desire for the sacrament of the Eucharist. This was the origin of the practice of ‘spiritual communion,’ which has happily been established in the Church for centuries and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life. St. Teresa of Jesus wrote: ‘When you do not receive communion and you do not attend Mass, you can make a spiritual communion, which is a most beneficial practice; by it the love of God will be greatly impressed on you.’”

It can be especially fruitful to make a spiritual communion when we are before Our Lord in Eucharistic adoration, whether he is revered in the monstrance or protected within the tabernacle.

In McSherrystown, Pa., Pam Singleton, a Spanish teacher and mother of five, discovered the grace-filled bonus of making spiritual communions in a prayer booklet left in the pew at her parish: “I love it whenever I’m at adoration and I think to pray the spiritual communion prayer. Not only is it powerful, but it gives me great comfort and calm to feel tightly united with Jesus during adoration.”

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Spiritual Communion Prayers

Act of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the most Blessed Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I desire to receive you into my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace you as if you have already come and unite myself wholly to you. Never permit me to be separated from you. Amen. — St. Alphonsus Liguori

Send Your Angel to Holy Mass

O, holy angel at my side,
go to the church for me.
Kneel in my place at holy Mass,
where I desire to be.
At Offertory in my stead,
take all I am and own,
and place it as a sacrifice
upon the altar throne.
At holy consecration's bell,
adore with seraph's love,
my Jesus, hidden in the Host,
come down from heaven above.
And when the priest Communion takes,
O, bring my Lord to me,
that his sweet heart may rest on mine,
and I his temple be.
Then pray for those I dearly love,
and those who cause me grief,
Jesus' love may cleanse all hearts
and suffering souls relieve.
Pray that this sacrifice divine,
may mankind's sin's efface,
then bring me Jesus' blessing home,
the pledge of every grace. Amen.
— Author unknown

Act of Love

I believe thou art present in the Blessed Sacrament, O Jesus. I love thee and desire thee. Come into my heart; I embrace thee. O never leave me. I beseech thee, O Lord Jesus, may the burning and most sweet power of thy love absorb my mind, that I may die through love of thy love, who wast graciously pleased to die through love of my love. Amen. — St. Francis of Assisi