

The Necessity and Advantage of Frequent Communion. (Extracted From Bishop Beveridge's Sermon on the Subject)

by J.H. Newman

J.H. Newman emphasizes the necessity and advantages of frequent Communion as a vital aspect of Christian obedience and spiritual health.

Scripture: Luke 22:19, Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 10:16, 1 Corinthians 11:23, Hebrews 10:25

Topics: "Holy Communion", "Sacramental Living"

Description

J.H. Newman preaches about the importance of frequent participation in the Holy Communion, emphasizing that it is CHRIST's own institution and command. He urges the congregation to consider the significance of this Sacrament in their salvation, highlighting the need to obey CHRIST's commands, especially in observing the Sacrament frequently. Newman explains the historical practices of the Apostles and Primitive Christians, who received the Sacrament daily or at least every Sunday, as a vital part of their devotion. He stresses the Church's expectation for parishioners to communicate at least three times a year, while encouraging more frequent participation for spiritual growth and nourishment.

Transcript

I HAVE done what I could; I have taken all occasions to convince you of your sin and danger in neglecting this Blessed Sacrament, and to persuade you to a more frequent receiving of it; but I see nothing will do: indeed nothing can do it but the Almighty Power of GOD, whom I therefore beseech of His Infinite mercy to open men's eyes, that they may "see the things that belong to their everlasting peace, before they be hid from them." And then I am sure this Sacrament would be as much frequented, as it hath been hitherto neglected. But seeing He is usually pleased to do this great work by the Ministry of His Word, I shall make it my business at this time, in his name, to put you in mind of your duty and interest in this particular, and so set before you such reasons why you ought to take all opportunities of receiving the Mystical Body and Blood of CHRIST your SAVIOUR, as I hope by His blessing may prevail with many to do it: GOD grant that it may do so with all that hear me at this time.

For this purpose, therefore, I desire you to consider, First, that this is CHRIST'S own Institution and Command. He, "who being in the form of GOD, thought it no robbery to be equal with GOD, and yet made Himself of no reputation for your sakes." He, who loved you so, as to give Himself for you,--He, who laid

down his own life to redeem and save you,--He, the very night before He died for you, He then instituted this Holy Sacrament; and He then said to all that hoped to be saved by Him, and to you among others, "Do this in remembrance of Me;" and, "do this as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." What? and will you that hope to be saved by Him, will you never do this at all? or only now and then, when perhaps you have nothing else to do? How then can ye hope to be saved by Him? Do you think that He will save you, whether ye observe His commands or no? And which of all his commands can ye ever observe, if ye do not observe this, which is so plain, so easy, so useful, and so necessary for you? No, deceive not yourselves. He that came into the world, and died on purpose to save you, you may be confident would never have required you to do this, and as often as you do it, to remember Him, but that it is necessary for your salvation that ye do it, and that ye do it as often as ye can, in remembrance of Him. And if it had been necessary in no other, as it is in many respects, yet His very commanding it, makes it so to you, and to your salvation. For as He is the only "Author of eternal salvation," He is so only to those who obey Him," (Heb. v. 9); that is, "to those who observe all things whatsoever He hath commanded." (Matth. xxviii. 20.) But this is one of those things which he hath commanded; and therefore unless you do this, you do not obey Him, and so have no ground to expect salvation from Him. He Himself hath told you in effect, that He will not save you; in that He said, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke xiii. 3, 5.) But ye all know, that he who lives in any wilful and known sin, or in the wilful neglect of any known duty, he hath not yet repented, and turned to GOD, but is still in his natural estate, in a state of sin and damnation. And if he happens to do so, he must inevitably perish; there is no help in the world for it.

Wherefore, my brethren, ye had need look about you. CHRIST your SAVIOUR hath expressly commanded you often to receive the Sacrament of His Body and Blood in remembrance of Him. And therefore you, who never yet received it, have lived all this while in the wilful breach of a known Law, and by consequence in a wilful and known sin: and you who receive it but seldom, do not fully obey or come up to the Law, which plainly requires you to do it often: at least if it may be had. It is true, should GOD in His Providence cast you upon a place where you could not receive it if ye would, I do not doubt but He would accept of your earnest desires of it, as well as if ye did receive it; and would make up the great losses you sustained in your spiritual estate for want of it, some other way. But blessed be His Great Name, this is not your case; for He in His good Providence hath so ordered it, that you live in a place where this Holy Sacrament is actually celebrated every LORD'S Day, and may be so, if there be occasion, every day in the year. Our Church requires the first, and hath provided for the other, by ordering that the same Collect, Epistle, and Gospel which is appointed for the Sunday, shall serve all the week after; and by consequence the whole Communion Service, of which they are a part. And therefore, unless you receive it, and receive it often too, you will live in the gross neglect, if not in a plain contempt of CHRIST'S command; as you will one day find to your shame and sorrow; for how well soever ye may otherwise live, this one sin is enough to ruin and destroy you for ever. "For," as St. James saith, "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." (James ii. 10.) And therefore, whatsoever else ye do, if ye do not this, but offend in this one point, you are liable to all the punishments that are threatened in the Law of GOD. Neither is there any way to avoid them, except you repent, and turn from this as well as from all other sins.

And that ye may not think that the receiving of this Blessed Sacrament only now and then, as perhaps two or three times a year, will excuse you from the imputation of living in the neglect of CHRIST'S command; I desire you to consider how the Apostles themselves and the Primitive Christians understood it. Which they sufficiently declared by their practice. For when our LORD was gone to Heaven, and had, according to His promise, sent down the HOLY SPIRIT upon His Apostles, and by that means brought into His

Church about three thousand souls in one day, it is said of them, that " they continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers," (Acts ii. 42.); and of all that believed, it is said, that " they, continuing daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, (ii. 46.)

Where we may observe, first, that by breaking of bread in the New Testament, is always meant the Administration of the LORD'S Supper. Secondly, this they are said to have done, [kat' oikon] from house to house, as we translate it; or rather in the house, as the Syriac and Arabic versions have it, and as the phrase [kat' oikon] is used by the Apostle himself, Rom. xvi. 5. 1 Cor. xvi. 19.; that is, they did it either in some private house, where there was a Church, or more probably in some of the houses or chambers belonging to the Temple, where they daily continued.

Thirdly, as they continued daily in the Temple at the hours of prayer, to perform their solemn devotions there, so they daily received the Holy Sacrament, and ate this spiritual food "with gladness and singleness of heart." This being indeed the chief part of their devotions, whensoever they could meet together to perform them. Especially upon the LORD'S Day, as the HOLY GHOST Himself informs us, saying, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, being ready to depart on the morrow," (Acts xx. 7.); where we see, they did not only break bread, or administer the Sacrament of our LORD'S Supper upon the first day of the week, which we, from St.

John, call the LORD'S Day; but upon that day they came together for that end and purpose. It is true, St. Paul being to go away next day, he took that opportunity when they were met together for that end, to give them a Sermon. But that was not the end of their meeting together at that time. They did not come to hear a Sermon, though St. Paul himself was to preach, but they came together to administer and receive CHRIST'S Mystical Body and Blood; which plainly shows, that this was the great work they did every LORD'S Day; and that they came together then on purpose to meet with CHRIST, and to partake of Him at His own table.

And seeing that the Law itself required, "that none should appear before the LORD empty, (Exod. xxiii. 15.); therefore St. Paul requires, that upon the first day of the week, when Christians thus met together to receive the Sacrament, "every one should lay by him in store, as GOD prospered him, for pious and charitable uses," (1 Cor. xvi. 2.) And hence proceeded that custom which is still continued in our Church, and ought to be so ill all. That whensoever we appear before the LORD at His own table, we, every one, according to his ability, offer up some thing to Him, of what He had bestowed upon us, as our acknowledgment of His bounty to us, in giving us whatsoever we have, and of His infinite mercy in giving Himself for us.

Now seeing the Apostles themselves, and such as they first converted and instructed in the faith of CHRIST, usually received this Holy Sacrament every day in the week, and constantly upon the LORD'S Day; it cannot be doubted, but that they looked upon themselves as obliged by CHRIST'S command to do so; and that when He said, "Do this, as often as ye do it, in remembrance of Me," His meaning and pleasure was, that they should often do it, so often as they met together to perform their public devotion to Him, if it was possible, or at least upon the LORD'S Day.

And as this was the sense wherein the Apostles understood our SAVIOUR'S words; so they transmitted the same together with the Faith, to those who succeeded them. For Tertullian, who lived in the next century after the Apostles, saith, that the Sacrament of the Eucharist, "in omnibus mandatum a Domino,

etiam Ante lucanis coetibus," was commanded by our LORD, to be celebrated in all Christian assemblies, even those which were held before day, (Ter. de cor. mil. cap. 3.) And before him Pliny the Second, who was contemporary with St.

John, in the account he gave of the Christians' manners to the Emperor Trajan, saith, among other things, "that they were wont upon a certain day, to meet together, before it was light, and to bind themselves by a Sacrament, not to do any ill thing," (Plin. Ep. 1. 10. cap. 97.) Which can be understood only of the Sacrament of the LORD'S Supper, as administered and received by them upon the LORD'S Day. And Justin Martyr himself, who lived in the next age after, in the Apology he wrote to Antonius Pius in behalf of the Christians, giving a particular account of what they did in their public congregations, saith, that [te tou heliou legomene hemera] upon that which is called the day of the Sun, or Sunday, all Christians that live either in the cities, or in the country, meet together; where they hear the writings of the Prophets and Apostles read, and an exhortation made to them; and then they having all joined together in their common prayers, bread and wine is brought and consecrated, or blessed by the President or Minister; and distributed to every one there present, and carried by Deacons to such as were absent. [kai he diadosis kai he matalepsis apo ton eucharistethenton hekasto ginetai].

And the distribution and participation of the consecrated elements is made to every one, (Just. Mart. Apol. 2.) And this food, saith he, [kaleitai par'Â' hemin Eucharistia], is called by us the Eucharist. From whence it appears, that in these days, every one that was at Prayers and Sermon, received also the Holy Sacrament, at least upon the LORD'S Day. None offered to go out until that was over; or if they did so, they were cast out of the Church, as not worthy to be called Christians: as appears from the Apostolical Canons made or collected much about that time, or soon after.

One whereof runs thus, [Pantas tous eisiontas pistous], etc. All believers that come to Church, and hear the Scriptures, but do not stay to join in the Prayers, and the Holy Communion, ought to be excommunicated, as bringing confusion into the Church, (Can. Apostol. 9.) It was then, it seems, reckoned a great disorder and confusion for any to go out of the Church, as they now commonly do, until the whole Service, of which the Communion was the principal part, was all over; and if any did so, they were judged unfit to come to Church, or keep company with Christians any longer.

This was the discipline of the Primitive and Apostolic Church. This was the piety of the first Christians: and it continued in a great measure for some ages, as might easily be shown. But this may be sufficient at present to prove, that the Apostles and Primitive Christians did not think that they observed our LORD'S command in the institution of this Holy Sacrament aright, by receiving it only now and then. For, as they would never have done it at all, but only in obedience unto that command; so is obedience to that command, they took all opportunities they could get, of doing it; at least they never omitted it upon the LORD'S Day.

But upon that day, whatsoever they did besides, they always did this in remembrance of what their Great LORD and SAVIOUR had done for them. And if we desire to be such Christians as they were, we must do as they did. We must, after their pious example, observe our LORD'S command, by eating this bread, and drinking this cup as often as we can; lest otherwise we lose the benefit of that death He suffered for us, by our neglecting to do what He hath commanded in remembrance of it.

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What effect they [my arguments] will have upon those that hear them, I know not; but fear that it will be much the same that reason and argument usually have upon the greatest part of mankind; that, very little, or none at all. But for my own part, when I seriously consider these things, I cannot but wonder with myself, how it comes to pass, that this Holy Sacrament, instituted by CHRIST Himself, is so much neglected and disused as it is, in a place where His religion is professed and acknowledged to be, as really it is, the only true religion in the world. And after all my search, I can resolve it into nothing else but the degeneracy of the age we live in, and the great decay of that most Holy Religion among us. I am sure, from the beginning it was not so. For some ages after the Establishment of the Christian Religion by CHRIST our Saviour, so long as they who embraced it gave them selves up to the conduct of that HOLY SPIRIT which He sent down among them, and were inspired by it with true zeal for GOD, and inflamed with love to their ever blessed REDEEMER, SO as to observe all things that He had commanded, whatsoever it cost them; then they never met together upon any day in the week, much less upon the LORD'S Day, for the Public Worship of GOD, but they all received this Holy Sacrament, as the principal business they met about, and the most proper Christian service they could perform. And it is very observable, that so long as this continued, men were endowed with the extraordinary gifts as well as the graces of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT, SO as to be able to do many wonderful things by it; yea, and suffer too whatsoever could be inflicted On them for CHRIST'S sake. But in process of time men began to leave off their first love to Him, and turn His religion into dispute and controversy; and then as their piety and devotion grew cooler and cooler, the Holy Sacrament began to be neglected more and more; and the Priests who administered it, had fewer and fewer to receive it, until at length they had some

obliged in duty and conscience to consecrate and receive it them selves, although they had none to receive with them. And this mistake, I suppose, gave the first occasion to that multitude of private masses which have been so much abused in the Church of Rome; where the priest commonly receives himself, although he hath never a one to communicate with him; and so there can be no communion at all. And as that abuse, so the disuse of the Holy Sacrament, sprang first from men's coldness and indifferency in religion, which hath prevailed so far in our days, that there are many thousands of persons who are baptized, and live many years in the profession of the Christian religion, and yet never receive the Sacrament of CHRIST'S Body and Blood in all their lives. And but very few that receive it above once or twice a year; which is a great reproach and shame to the age we live in; but none at all to the Church: for she is always ready to administer it, if people could be persuaded to come to it. But that they cannot, or rather will not be; they have still one pretence or other to excuse themselves, but none that will excuse them before GOD and their own consciences another day.

What their pretences are, I shall not undertake to determine. They are so many, that they cannot easily be numbered. And many of them so vain and trifling, that they are not worth rehearsing. But the bottom of them all is this; men renounced the world, the devil, and the flesh in their baptism, but they are loth to do it in their lives: they then promised to serve GOD, but now they find something else to do. They have all one sin or other that reigns over them, and captivates their hearts and affections, so that they cannot endure the thoughts of parting with it. And they think, as they ought to do, that if they come to the Holy Sacrament, they must first examine themselves, repent of all their sins, turn to GOD, renew their baptismal vow, and resolve to lead a new life. But this they are resolved not to do. And if they should come to the Sacrament, it would but disturb their quiet, make them uneasy in their minds, and hinder them from enjoying the pleasure they were wont to take in all their sins. And for their part, they had rather displease GOD than themselves; and neglect their duty rather than leave their sins. And to add sin to sin, and "treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of GOD." This is

plainly the case of most of those who live in the neglect of His Holy Commandment. And what can be said to such men? so long as such, they are not fit to come to the Communion. And therefore all that can be said to them, is only to beg of them to consider their condition before it be too late, and repent as soon as they can: lest they die, as they have lived, in sin, and so be punished with "everlasting destruction from the "presence of the LORD, and from the glory of His power."

But there are others who do receive the Sacrament of CHRIST'S Body and Blood sometimes, as perhaps two or three times in a year; and my charity prompts me to believe, that they would do it oftener, if they thought it to be their duty. But there are some things which at first sight may seem, at least to them, to plead their excuse; and therefore deserve to be duty considered by us. As first, they say, our Church requires them only to receive three times a year: and they do not question but she would oblige them to receive it oftener, if it was necessary. This is a mistake that a great many have fallen into, and by that means have been kept from the Sacrament more than otherwise they would have been. I call it a mistake; for it is so, and a very great one. For as in all things else, so particularly in this, our Church keeps close to the pattern of the Apostolic and Primitive Church; when, as I have before observed, the LORD'S Supper was administered and received commonly every day in the week, but most constantly upon the LORD'S Day. And our Church supposeth it to be so still, and therefore hath accordingly made provision for it. Which, that I may fully demonstrate to you, it will be necessary to inquire into the sense and practice of our Church in this point all along from the beginning of the Reformation, or, to speak more properly, from the time when she was restored to that Apostolical form which she is now of, as she was at first; which we date from the reign of King Edward VI.

For in the first year of that pious prince, the Liturgy, or Book of Common Prayer, was first compiled; and in the second it was settled by Act of Parliament. In which book it is ordered, that the Exhortation to those who are minded to receive the Sacrament, shall be read; which is there set down, much the same that we read now. But afterwards it is said, "in Cathedral Churches, or other places where there is daily Communion, it shall be sufficient to read this Exhortation above written once in a month. And in Parish Churches upon the week-days it may be left unsaid." Fol. 123. Where we may observe, first, that in those days there was daily Communion in Cathedral Churches, and other places, as there used to be in the Primitive Church. And accordingly I find, in the records of St. Paul's, that when the plate, jewels, &c. belonging to the said Cathedral, were delivered to the King's Commissioners, they, upon the Dean and Chapter's request, permitted to remain, among other things, "two pair of basyns for to bring the Communion Bread, and to receive the offerings for the poor; whereof one pair silver, for every day, the other for festivals, &c. gilt." (Dugdall Hist. of St. Paul's, page 274.) From whence it is plain, that the Communion was then celebrated in that Church every day. And so it was even in Parish Churches. For otherwise it needed not to be ordered as it is in the Rubric above mentioned, that in Parish Churches upon the week-days the said Exhortation may be left unsaid. And to the same purpose it is afterwards said, "when the Holy Communion is celebrated on the work-day, or in private houses, then may be omitted the Gloria in Excelsis, the Creed, the Homily, and the Exhortation." Fol. 132.

Next after that we quoted first, this Rubric immediately follows; "And if upon the Sunday or Holy-day, the people be negligent to come to the Communion, then shall the Priest earnestly exhort his parishioners to dispose themselves to the receiving of the Holy Communion more diligently, saying," &c. Which shows, that upon all Sundays and Holy-days people then generally received; the Church expected and required it of them. And if any Minister found that his parishioners did not always come, at least upon those days, he was to exhort and admonish them to dispose themselves more diligently for it; and that by the command of

the Church itself; whereby she hath sufficiently declared her will and desire, that all her members should receive the Communion as they did in the Primitive times, every day in the week if possible; and if that could not be, yet at least every Sunday and Holy-day in the year.

In the Rubric after the Communion Service, there are several things to the same purpose; for it is there ordered, that upon Wednesdays and Fridays, although there be none to communicate, the Priest shall say all things at the Altar appointed to be said at the celebration of the LORD'S Supper, until after the Offertory. And then it follows: "And the same order shall be used whensoever the people be customably assembled to pray in the Church, and none disposed to communicate with the Priest." Fol. 130. Whereby we are given to understand, that upon what day soever people came to Church, the Priest was to be ready to celebrate the Holy Sacrament if any were disposed to communicate with him. And if there were none, he was to show his readiness, by reading a considerable part of the Communion Service.

There is another Rubric in the same place, that makes it still plainer. Which I shall transcribe, because the book is not commonly to be had; neither can it be expressed better than in its words, which are these: "Also, that the receiving of the Sacrament of the Blessed Body and Blood of CHRIST, may be most agreeable to the Institution thereof, and to the usage of the Primitive Church, in all Cathedral and Collegiate Churches there shall always some communicate with the Priest that ministereth. And that the same may be also observed every where abroad in the country, some one at the least of that house in every Parish, to whom by course, after the ordinance herein made, it appertaineth to offer for the charges of the Communion; or some other whom they shall provide to offer for them, shall receive the Holy Communion with the Priest; the which may be the better done, for that they know before when their course cometh, and may therefore dispose themselves to the worthy receiving of the Sacrament. And with him or them, who doth so offer the charges of the Communion, all other who be then godly disposed thereunto, shall likewise receive the Communion. And by this means the Minister having always some to communicate with him, may accordingly solemnize so High and Holy Mysteries, with all the suffrages and due order appointed for the same. And the Priest on the week day shall forbear to celebrate the Communion, except he have some that will communicate with him."

Here we see what care the Church took that the Sacrament might be daily administered, not only in Cathedral, but likewise in Parish Churches. For which purpose, whereas every Parishioner had before been used to find the Holy Loaf, as it was called, in his course; in the Rubric before this, it is ordained that every Pastor or Curate shall find sufficient Bread and Wine for the Communion; and that the Parishioners every one in his course, shall offer the charges of it at the Offertory to the Pastor or Curate; and in this it is ordained that every such Parishioner shall then in his course communicate, or else get some other person to do it, that so the Communion may be duly celebrated; and all there present that were godly disposed might partake of it. Which one would have thought as good a Provision as could have been made in the case. But notwithstanding, through the obstinacy or carelessness of some, in not making their said offering as they were commanded, it sometimes failed; as appears from the Letter written about a year after by the Privy Council, and subscribed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and others, to the Bishops, to assure them that the King intended to go on with the Reformation, wherein among other things they say: "And farther, whereas it is come to our knowledge that divers froward and obstinate persons do refuse to pay towards the finding of Bread and Wine for the Holy Communion, according to the order prescribed in the said book, by reason whereof the Holy Communion is many times omitted upon the Sunday. These are to will and command you to convent such obstinate persons before you, and them to admonish and command to keep the order prescribed in the said book. And if any such shall refuse so to do, to punish

them by suspension, excommunication, or "other censures of the Church." (Hist. of Reform. Part II. Coll. p. 192.) From whence we may also learn how much they were troubled to hear that the Holy Sacrament was ally where omitted even upon the Sunday, upon any Sunday; how great a fault and scandal they judged it to be, and what care they took to prevent it for the future.

This was the state of this affair at the beginning of the Reformation, and it continues in effect the same to this day. About three or four years after the aforesaid Book of Common Prayer first came out, it was revised, and set forth again with some alterations in the form, but none that were material in the substance of it. Only the former way of the Parishioners finding Bread and Wine for the Communion every one in his course, being now found not so effectual as was expected; that was now laid aside, and it was ordered to be provided at the charges of the Parish in general, in these words: "The Bread and Wine for the Communion shall be provided by the Curate and Church "wardens, at the charges of the Parish; and the Parish shall be discharged of such sums of money or other duties, which hitherto they have paid for the same, by order of their houses, every Sunday." Where we may take notice, that as hitherto it had been provided every Sunday by the houses of every Parish, as they lay in order, it was now to be provided by the Minister and Churchwardens, at the charges of the whole Parish, but still every Sunday, as it was before; which being the most certain way that could be found out for it, it is still continued. The first part of this Rubric, whereby it is enjoined, being still in force. But the latter part, from these words, "and the Parish shall be discharged," &c. is now left out, as it was necessary it should be, after the former course had been disused for above an hundred years.

Now this Book of Common Prayer, which was thus settled by Act of Parliament, in the fifth and sixth year of Edward the VI., was that which was afterwards confirmed in the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's reign, with one alteration or addition of certain lessons to be used on every Sunday in the year, and the form of the Litany altered, and corrected, with two sentences only added in the delivery of the Sacrament to the Communicants. These were all the alterations that were then made, or indeed that have been ever made since that time to this, except it be in words or phrases, in the addition of some prayers, and in some such inconsiderable things, as do not at all concern our present purpose. For the care of our Church, to have the Holy Communion constantly celebrated, hath been the same all along, from the time that the Book of Common Prayer before spoken of, was first settled. As may be easily proved from that which was established by the last Act of Uniformity. Which therefore I shall now briefly consider, so far as it relates to the business in hand; that we may understand the sense of our Church at present concerning it.

For this purpose therefore we may first observe that the Communion Service is appointed for the Communion itself, and therefore called the Order for the Administration of the LORD'S Supper, or Holy Communion. Now our Church supposing, or at least hoping that some of her members will receive this Holy Communion every day, hath taken care that this service may be used every day in the week, as appears from the Rubric immediately before the proper lessons, which is this: "Note also, that the Collect, Epistle, and Gospel appointed for the Sunday, shall serve all the week after, where it is not in this book otherwise ordered." But the Collect, Epistle, and Gospel are part of the Communion Service, for which there is no occasion on the week days; neither can it be used except the Communion be administered, which therefore is here supposed to be done every day in the week. And so it is also in the celebration of the Communion itself, where there are proper prefaces appointed to be used upon certain days. Upon Christmas-day and seven days after. Upon Easter-day and seven days after. Upon Ascension-day and seven days after. Upon Whit-Sunday and six days after (the next day being Trinity Sunday, which hath one peculiar to itself). Now to what purpose are these prefaces appointed to be used seven days together,

or six, none of which can be a Sunday, if the Sacrament ought not to be administered upon all those days, and so upon week days as well as Sundays? They are all, as I intimated before, to be used in the actual Administration of it, and therefore plainly suppose it to be actually administered upon each of those days, which being for the most part neither Sundays nor Holy-days, they most evidently demonstrate, that according to the mind and order of our Church, as well as the Primitive, the LORD'S Supper ought to be administered every day, that all who live as they ought, in her Communion, may be daily partakers of it.

In the rules and orders (which we call the Rubric), after the Communion Service, there are several things that deserve to be considered in this case. It is there ordered, that there shall be no celebration of the Communion, except there be a convenient number; that is, four, or three at the least, to communicate with the Priest. According to which rule, although the Priest have all things ready, and desires to consecrate and receive the Holy Sacrament himself, yet he must not do it, unless he have such a number to communicate with him, that it may be properly a Communion. But, as it is there ordered, "Upon the Sundays and other Holy-days (if there be no Communion) shall be said all that is appointed at the Communion until the end of the general prayer (for the good estate of the Catholic Church of CHRIST);" where we may observe, that the Church, as I have shown, appoints the Sacrament to be administered every day. But if it so fall out, that there be not in any place a convenient number to communicate with the Priest, and by consequence, according to the order before mentioned, no Communion; yet nevertheless upon Sundays and other Holy-days so much of the Communion Service shall be said as is there limited. Why only upon Sundays and Holy-days, but to distinguish them from other days, on which if there be a sufficient number of Communicants, the whole Communion Service is to be used; but no part of it, except there be so; but upon Sundays and Holy-days, although there be not such a number, and therefore no Communion; yet, however, the Priest shall go up to the Altar, and there read all that is appointed to be said at the Communion, until the end of the prayer for CHRIST'S Catholic Church; whereby the people may see, that neither he nor the Church is to be blamed, if the Holy Sacrament be not then administered. For as much as he is there ready by the order of the Church to do it, and goes as far as he can in the Service appointed for it, without the actual administration of it; and therefore that the fault is wholly in themselves that it is not actually administered, because they will not make up a convenient number among them to communicate with him. Which is a most excellent order; for the people hereby have not only GOD'S Holy Commandments solemnly proclaimed, the Epistle and Gospel for the day, the Nicene Creed, and prayers proper for that occasion read to them; but they are likewise put in mind of their duty to their SAVIOUR in receiving His most Blessed Body and Blood, and upbraided with their neglect of it. For which purposes also, I think it very expedient, that the order of the Church for the reading that part of the Service at the Communion Table, even when there is no Communion, be duly observed.

The next Rubric, in the same place, that concerns our present business, is this; " And in all Cathedral and Collegiate Churches and Colleges, where there are many Priests and Deacons, they shall all receive the Communion with the Priest every Sunday at the least, except they have a reasonable cause to the contrary." Where we see that the Church doth not command, but supposes that the Sacrament is constantly administered in all such places; taking it for granted, that it is never omitted there, where there are so many persons devoted to the service of GOD; but that there is always a sufficient number to communicate.

But she absolutely commands, that all Priests and Deacons that belong to such foundations, shall receive the Communion with the Priest every Sunday at the least, except any of them have a reasonable cause to the contrary (which the Ordinary of the place, I suppose, is to be judge of): they are bound therefore, all

and every one of them, to receive it every Sunday, which notwithstanding they cannot do, unless it be administered every Sunday among them. Wherefore if there be any such places where it is not so administered, or any such persons who do not, without just cause to the contrary, receive it every Sunday in the year, I do not see how they can answer it to GOD, to the Church, or to their own consciences, Neither are they bound to receive it only every Sunday, but every Sunday at the least: which plainly supposeth that it is administered upon other days as well as Sundays.

For otherwise they could not receive it oftener, if they would. And it is to be hoped, that all such persons receive it as often as it is administered among them. But the Church expressly requires them to receive it at least every Sunday, so as never to omit it at least upon that day, except they have a reasonable, or such a cause to the contrary as will justify their omission of it before the Church, and CHRIST Himself at the last day. These things being thus briefly explained, we shall easily see into the meaning of the words that gave us the occasion to discourse of them, which are these, in the place last quoted; And note, that every parishioner shall communicate at the least three times in the year, of which EASTER to be one.

From whence some have been tempted to think, that the Church doth not look upon it as necessary that they should communicate above thrice a year. I say, tempted to think so. For no man surely in his right wits can of himself draw such an inference from these words, which is so directly contrary to the sense of the Church, and hath no foundation at all in the words themselves. For the Church, as I have shown, hath taken all the care she can, that the Holy Sacrament should be every where administered, if it was possible, every day, at least every Sunday and Holy-Day in the year; which she would never have done, if she had thought it sufficient for any one to receive only thrice a year.

For then all her care about the frequent administration of it, would be in vain, and to no purpose. And besides, she hath drawn up an excellent exhortation to be read by the Minister of every parish, in case he sees the people negligent to come to the Holy Communion, beginning thus: "Dearly beloved, onÂ--I intend by GODÂ'S Grace, to celebrate the LORDÂ'S Supper." Where we may observe, that it is not said on such a Sunday, but onÂ--with a blank, to shew that the Minister may appoint the Communion on any day of the week, when he can have a sufficient number to communicate with him; and so it is in the other exhortation; only there is day put in, which may be understood of Tuesday or Wednesday, or any other day as well as Sunday, for the same reason.

In that first mentioned, the Minister, in the words, and by the order of the Church, invites all there present, and beseecheth them for the LORD JESUS CHRISTÂ'S sake, to come to the LORDÂ'S Supper. And among other things, he saith to them all, "I bid you in the name of GOD, I call you in CHRISTÂ'S behalf, I exhort you as you love your own salvation, that ye will be partakers of this Holy Communion." There are several such pathetic expressions in that Exhortation, wherewith the Church most earnestly exhorts, adviseth, admonisheth all persons to come to this Holy Sacrament.

And this Exhortation every Minister is to read publicly before all his congregation, whensoever he sees them negligent to come to it; as all are, who come but two or three times a year, where they may have it oftener if they will. They plainly live in the neglect of it, and therefore ought to have this Exhortation read to them, according to the order of the Church. Whereby she hath sufficiently demonstrated, that she doth not think it enough for people generally to receive it only three times in a year; but that it is her opinion, that they ought, and her hearty desire they would receive it as often as it is, or, according to her order, ought to be, administered among them.

But then she wisely considers withal, that being a National Church, made up of all sorts of persons, it is necessary that her general Rules and Orders should be accommodated, as much as possible, to the several conditions and circumstances that many of them may be sometimes in. And therefore, although she exhorts all her members to frequent and constant Communion, yet she does not think fit to command, and oblige them all, under the pain of excommunication, to receive oftener than three times a year, lest some might be thereby tempted to come sometimes without that preparation and disposition of mind that is requisite to the worthy partaking of so great a Mystery. I say, under pain of excommunication; for that is the meaning and the effect of this law, that they who do not communicate at least three times in a year, may, and ought to be cast out of the communion of CHRIST'S Church, as no longer fit to be called Christians, seeing they live in such a gross neglect of CHRIST'S own command, and of that duty whereby Christians are in an especial manner distinguished from other men. Other men, as Jews, Turks, and Heathens, may fast and pray and hear Sermons, in their way; but to receive the Sacrament of CHRIST'S Supper, is proper and peculiar only to Christians, or such as profess that religion which JESUS CHRIST hath settled in the world. And therefore they who receive the Sacrament, do thereby manifest themselves to be Christians. They who do it not, make it at least doubtful whether they be Christians or no; for although they were baptized, and so made Christians once, who knows whether they have not renounced their baptism and apostatized from the Christian religion? They themselves perhaps may profess they have not; but the Church can never know it, but hath just cause to suspect the contrary, so long as they refuse to renew the vow they made in the Sacrament of Baptism, by receiving that of the LORD'S Supper. And the least that can be required of them for that purpose, is to do it three times a year; which therefore the Church absolutely requires; not that it is not necessary for them to receive it oftener, in order to their salvation; but because it is necessary they should do it at least so often, that the Church may be satisfied that they continue in their communion, and constant to that religion wherein alone salvation can be had.

And hence it is, that in the rule itself, it is not said that every person, but every parishioner, shall communicate at the least three times in the year; which therefore is required of all, not as they are members only of the Catholic, but as they are members of a Parochial Church; and they are bound by this law to do it at least so often in their own Parish Church, where they are parishioners: otherwise they do not do it as parishioners, as the law requires. So that although a man communicates an hundred times in any other place; as in the Cathedral, which is free to all of the Diocess, or in a Chapel of Ease, or in any other Church, when he can have it at his own, this does not satisfy the law. But he must communicate at least three times in the year, as a parishioner, in his own Parish Church, where there are officers called Churchwardens, appointed on purpose to take notice of it, and to inform the Church against him, if he neglect to do it so often as she requires. That she may use the most effectual means to bring him to repentance for his sin, and to make him more careful for the future to perform so great and necessary a duty as this is; or if he continue obstinate, cut him off from the Body of CHRIST, as no longer worthy to be called a member of it. And therefore all that can be reasonably inferred from this law, is, that the Church doth not think them fit to communicate at all, who will not communicate at least three times in the year. But as for her opinion of the necessity of communicating oftener, in order to men'S obtaining eternal salvation by the Blood of CHRIST, that she hath sufficiently declared, by the great care she hath taken, to have this Holy Sacrament administered constantly, as often as it was in the Apostles' and Primitive time of Christianity; that is, as often as any Christian can desire to have it. For according to the order and discipline of our Church, if a sufficient number of parishioners, against whom there is no just exception, desire to receive it every Sunday, or every day in the year, the Minister of their parish not only may, but, as I humbly conceive, is bound to consecrate and administer it to them. The want of such a number being, as

far as I can perceive, the only reason that can ever justify the omission of it.

I have endeavoured to set this matter in as clear a light as I could, because it will discover to us, several things very observable concerning the Church we live in. For hereby we see how exactly she follows the pattern of the Primitive and Apostolic Church in this particular, as well as others; what great care she hath taken that the Bread and Water of Life may be duly distributed to all her members whensoever they hunger and thirst after it. With how great prudence she hath so ordered it, that all may have it as often as they will, and yet none compelled to receive it oftener than it is absolutely necessary, in order to their manifesting themselves to continue in the faith of CHRIST. How desirous she is that all would receive it constantly, and yet how careful that none may receive it unworthily. How uniform she hath been in her orders about it all along; and by consequence, what cause we all have to bless GOD, that we live in the communion of such a Church; and how much it behoves us to receive the Holy Communion of her; not only as often as she strictly commands all to receive it, under the pain of excommunication, but as often as she adviseth and exhorteth us to do it in order to our eternal salvation, and as she is ready and desirous to communicate it to us; And then we should be sure to receive it as often as we are bound, either in duty to GOD, or by our own interest to do it.

* * * *

The Blessed Body and Blood of CHRIST, received, as it ought to be, with quick and lively faith, will most certainly have its desired effect. But it operates, for the most part, upon our souls, as our ordinary food doth upon our bodies, insensibly and by degrees. We eat and drink every day, and by that means our bodies grow to their full stature, and are then kept up in life, health, and vigour, though we ourselves know not how this is done, nor perhaps take any notice of it. So it is with this spiritual meat and drink, which GOD hath prepared for our souls. By eating and drinking frequently of it, we grow by degrees in grace, and in the "knowledge of our LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST," and still continue steadfast and active in the true faith and fear of GOD; though after all, we may be no way sensible how this wonderful effect is wrought in us, but only as we find it to be so by our own experience. And if we do that, we have no cause to complain that we get nothing by it; for we get more than all the world is worth; being strengthened in the inward man, and so made more fit for the service of GOD, more constant in it, and more able to perform it; or at least are kept from falling back, and preserved from many sins and temptations, which otherwise we might be exposed to; and this surely is enough to make any one that really minds the good of his soul, to hunger and thirst after this Bread and Water of life, and to eat and drink it as often as he can, although he do not presently feel the happy effect of it, as some have done, and as he himself some times may, when GOD seeth it necessary or convenient for him. In the mean while he may rest satisfied in his mind, that he is in the way that CHRIST hath made to Heaven; and thank GOD for giving him so many opportunities of partaking of CHRIST'S Body and Blood, and also grace to lay hold of them, to improve them to his own unspeakable comfort, such as usually attends the worthy receiving of the LORD'S Supper: whereby we are not only put in mind of the great Sacrifice which the SON of GOD offered for our sins, but likewise have it actually communicated unto us, for our pardon and reconciliation to the ALMIGHTY GOVERNOR of the world, which is the greatest comfort we can have on this side Heaven; so great, that we shall never be able to express it unto others, how deeply soever we may be affected with it in ourselves. And though we be not always thus sensibly cheered and refreshed with it, as we could wish to be, howsoever we can never receive the blessed Sacrament, but we have the pleasure and satisfaction of having done our duty to our MAKER and REDEEMER, which far exceeds all the comforts of this life, and therefore may well stay our stomachs till GOD sees good to give us more.

* * * *

The oftener we do it, [partake the LORD'S Supper,] the more expert we shall be at it, and the more benefit and comfort we shall receive from it. It is very difficult, if not impossible, for those who do it only now and then, (as once or twice a year,) ever to do it as they ought; for every time they come to it, they must begin as if it were again; all the impressions which were made upon their minds at the last Sacrament, being worn out before the next; and it being a thing they are not accustomed to, they are as much to seek how to do it now, as if they had never done it before. It is by frequent acts that habits are produced. It is by often eating and drinking this spiritual food, that we learn how to do it, so as to digest and convert it into proper nourishment for our souls. And therefore I do not wonder that they who do it seldom, I never do it as they ought, nor by consequence, get any good by it, I should rather wonder if they did. But let any man do it often, and always according to the directions before laid down, and my life for his, he shall never lose his labour; but, whether he perceives it or not, he will grow in grace, and gather spiritual strength every time more and more.

If such considerations as these will not prevail upon men, to lay aside their little excuses for the neglect of so great a duty, and to resolve for the future upon the more constant performance of it; for my part, I know not what will and therefore shall say no more, but that I never expect to see our Church settled, Primitive Christianity revived, and true piety and virtue flourish again among us, till the Holy Communion be oftener celebrated, than it hath been of late, in all places of the Kingdom: and am sure, that if people were but sensible of the great advantage it would be to them, they would need no other arguments to persuade them to frequent it as often as they can. For we should soon find, as many have done already, by experience, that this is the great means appointed by our Blessed REDEEMER, whereby to communicate Himself, and all the merits of His most precious Death and Passion to us, for the pardon of all our sins, and for the "purging our consciences from dead works to serve the living GOD." So that by applying ourselves thus constantly unto Him, we may receive constant supplies of grace and power from Him to live in His true faith and fear all our days; and by conversing so frequently with Him at His Holy Table upon earth, we shall be always fit and ready to go to Him, and to converse perpetually with Him at His Kingdom above, where we shall have no need of Sacraments, but shall see Him face to face, and adore and praise Him for ever; as for all His other blessings, so particularly for the many opportunities he hath given us, of partaking of His most Blessed Body and Blood.

OXFORD,

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