



From A Bishop's Journal (757)

A Taste for the Eucharist (3)

On May 11 of this year I published my fifteenth pastoral letter for Pentecost, and this time it was on the Eucharist. After writing about the first communion of Saint John Mary Vianney, the curé of Ars, and that of Saint Bernadette Soubirous, to whom the Blessed Virgin appeared in Lourdes, here is the account of Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus' first communion.

First Communion of Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus (1873-1897)

In *The Story of A Soul*, Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus writes about May 8, 1884, when she made her First Communion at the age of eleven. The communion was preceded by a three-month preparation and two confessions. "The smallest details of this heavenly day made an everlasting impression on my soul, but I do not want to go into the details. Some things lose their fragrance as soon as they are brought out into the open, and there are some aspirations of the soul that cannot be translated into human language without losing their intimate and heavenly meaning... Oh! How sweet was the first kiss of Jesus upon my soul!... It was a kiss of love, I felt loved, and I said 'I love you, and I give myself to you for ever.' There have been no demands, no struggles, no sacrifices for a long time. Jesus and poor little Theresa had looked one another, and they understood one another...

On that day, it was no longer a gaze, but a fusion of hearts, they were no longer two, Theresa had disappeared like the drop of water in the ocean. Only Jesus remained, he was Master and King. Her joy was too great, too deep for her to contain it, tears of happiness flooded her face, to the great surprise of her companions... 'I was the one who read the act of dedication to the Blessed Virgin, that afternoon. I put all my heart into talking to her, dedicating myself to her like a child who runs into its mother's arms and asks her protection.'

Sweet Memories

The day after my First Communion was another beautiful day, but there was a tinge of sadness. The beautiful dress Marie had bought for me, and all the gifts I had received, did not fill my heart. Only Jesus could satisfy me, and I yearned for the day I would receive him the second time. About a month after my First Communion I went to confession for Ascension day and I asked permission to receive holy communion. Against all hope Father gave me permission and I had the joy of kneeling at the holy table between Papa and Marie. I have kept such a beautiful memory of this second visit

of Jesus to me! My tears could not be contained, and I kept repeating to myself the words of Saint Paul: 'I live but not I, it is Jesus living in me'."

Our Children's First Communions

If we only took the time not to question but to listen to our children preparing to make their First Communion we would be surprised to hear about their experiences and emotions. Without being John Marys, Bernadettes or Therasas, it is fantastic to realise all that they can experience at that time. Grace helps them find the correct words, but especially attitudes of adoration, self-giving, wonder, and offering. Because of their First Communion our children can help one another and are even capable of boundless heroism. Despite their age, they discover their friend Jesus and they try to love him with all their hearts. And they have even reached a certain degree of mysticism that cannot be measured, and an incomparable degree of love. Our saints today can be no older than six, nine, or twelve years old... Let us see them with the eyes of Jesus!

A New Development

In 1910, in the decree *Quam Singulari*, Pope Saint Pius X asked that children at a younger age be admitted to first communion, at the age of reason, that is, around the age of seven. This first communion then became known as "private communion" or "little communion," and "solemn communion" continued to be celebrated around 12-13 years of age; it marked the crowning of childhood and the end of catechism. Since the 1970s, though, "private communion-solemn communion" has been replaced by first communion and the profession of faith. Others prefer to stress Confirmation preparation and follow the traditional sequence of the sacraments: baptism, confirmation, eucharist; the place of the sacrament of forgiveness raises some questions, here. In other places, in Ontario and the United States, in order to respect the traditional sequence, the time of confirmation has been moved back to grade two, to the discontent of those who would see confirmation given at a later age. In our Diocese of Edmundston, the usual age for first communion is around grade three; the customary "decorum" (white dress, arm band, etc.) having completely disappeared, after an appropriate preparation each child receives first communion in a very simple way. We can still see First Communion pictures of times past, but memories associated with the event are even more rare than for confirmation. We hope that this communion is the first of many... and not the last.

What Is First Communion?

According to the catechism, first communion is the reception of the sacrament of the Eucharist for the first time. It brings the children into a first contact with Christ by creating an intimate relationship. It touches their hearts and makes them realise that Jesus is close to them. It brings them into themselves to encounter Christ and to help them ask Jesus to help them be good. Some parents would like their child to receive first communion at a young enough age, and that he or she not be obliged to wait for the parish celebration, because they believe that their child is well disposed, and

First Communion is a “personal affair...” However, growing in the faith is not a “personal affair” but a richness of the Church. First communion requires serious preparation and supposes that the children have a good understanding of the Eucharist. It also depends on the Christian life of the family...

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07-09-08