

Sending us on a mission

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When I was growing up, which was before most people had dishwashers in the home, my mom would line up us five kids in front of the sink after evening dinner for our post-supper chores. My older brother would scrape the plates. My oldest sister was in charge of the actual washing. Next to her another sister would oversee the rinsing, and another sister and I would dry and put away. Sometimes (I'm not making this up), to help keep us on task, our mom would lead us in the Rosary while our dad stole away to his chair to read the paper. More often, though, we played a game called "If I Went on a Trip."

The game unfolded like this: The first person would say, "If I went on a trip, I would take..." and then say a word that began with the letter "A." The next person would say, "If I went on a trip, I would take" and then repeat the first person's word and then add their own word beginning with the letter "B," and so on through the alphabet. If you forgot a word or said the wrong word, you were out of the game.

Jesus doesn't test our memories when we receive Him in Communion. He does ask, though, that we test ourselves. We should not receive Communion if we are aware of any unconfessed and unrepented mortal sin on our soul (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1385). "Anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to Communion," states the *Catechism*.

Just like we wouldn't start out on a long road trip without having our car properly serviced, we shouldn't receive Communion without kicking our tires (our conscience) to make sure they're truly road worthy. All that will guarantee a safe trip and the arrival at our destination. In the sacramental life, says the *Catechism*, "the fruits of the sacraments...depend on the disposition of the one who receives them" (1128). Cars won't run properly if you dilute gas with water or some other substance; our souls won't run properly if we receive Communion "diluted" by grave sins.

But what happens when we do receive Communion worthily? The Eucharist becomes the spiritual food that fuels us to live out our mission as baptized Catholics. When the priest offers the final blessing and dismissal, he commands us to make the fruits of our reception of Communion known to others. There are four dismissals the priest (or deacon) can choose from: "Go forth, the Mass is ended"; "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord"; "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord in your life," or, simply, "Go in peace." Implicit in each of those commands is how we are to make the fruits of Communion visible in our lives.

The *Catechism* lists five effects or "fruits" of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion.

First, Communion strengthens our bond with Christ. "The principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion is an intimate union with Christ Jesus" (*Catechism*, no. 1391). We grow in our life as Catholic Christians by receiving the Body of Christ.

Second, Communion gives us the grace to persevere against the Devil's temptations and avoid sin.

Third, Communion unites us more strongly to the other members of the body of Christ, the Church.

Fourth, Communion makes us more aware of and responsive to the needs of our less-fortunate brothers and sisters. When we receive Communion we pray for the grace not only to recognize Christ in the faces of our neighbors, but to respond to them as Christ Himself did.

Finally, Communion is food for our pilgrimage here on earth as we make our way to our heavenly home. As we "Go forth" at the conclusion of the Mass, we do so with the grace we need to be missionary evangelizers. We need no other proof of this reality than the story of Jesus meeting up with two disciples on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection. We all know the Easter episode from St. Luke's Gospel (Lk 24:13-35). Two disciples are walking away from Jerusalem toward the nearby town of Emmaus when Jesus, whom they don't recognize in his risen and glorified state, begins to walk alongside them. Jesus asks them what they're talking about. After questioning him as to why he is the only visitor to Jerusalem who hadn't heard about what had happened and telling him they've also heard reports that Jesus has risen from the dead, the two walk farther along in the Lord's company. "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Lk 24:27).

But it isn't until they sit down at table together and Jesus takes the bread in front of him, blesses it and gives it to them to eat that they recognize Him as the Risen Christ. He has given them his Body, in the same exact way he did for the Apostles at the Last Supper, and in the same way that he does for us at every Mass. The disciples who have shared

this first supper with the Lord, now with burning hearts, rush back to Jerusalem to tell the Eleven “The Lord has risen indeed” (Lk 24:34).

Jesus wants to do similarly marvelous things with each one of us when we receive Him in Communion. For our part, when we leave Church after Mass, we are meant to wear out the road between our parish church and our homes, our workplaces, our schools, and wherever we are led to go, proclaiming to all we meet just how Jesus Christ has changed or renewed or awakened or enlivened us. And not just once, but time and again until we are privileged to receive Him, God willing, in *viaticum* on our death beds as we prepare to meet Him.