

The
EUCCHARIST

50 QUESTIONS *From the* PEWS

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Liguori
LIGUORI, MISSOURI

Imprimi Potest:
Thomas D. Picton, C.Ss.R.
Provincial, Denver Province
The Redemptorists

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Published by Liguori Publications
Liguori, Missouri 63057-9999

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Fragomeni, Richard N.
The Eucharist / Richard Fragomeni.
p. cm.
ISBN 978-0-7648-1699-4
1. Lord's Supper—Catholic Church—Miscellanea. 2. Catholic Church—Doctrines—Miscellanea. I. Title.
BX2215.3. F73 2008
264'.02036—dc22

2008045020

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To order, call 800-325-9521
www.liguori.org

Printed in the United States of America
12 11 10 09 08 5 4 3 2 1
First edition



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INTRODUCTION

Religious practices are a kind of language, a way of communicating something important. The celebration of the liturgical rites, especially the Eucharist, is a great symphony of gestures, signs, symbols, words, and relationships. Devotional practices are also a language. They can communicate a profound personal longing for God that official liturgical practices don't always address adequately.

Since the Second Vatican Council, Catholics have been invited by Church leadership to engage in a spiritual renewal that finds its source and summit in the celebration of the liturgy, especially the Eucharist. Devotional prayer is one aspect of the Church's renewal that has gained momentum, reviving rites and rituals that are new and unknown to many. The people in the pews have many questions about them.

The fifty questions in this booklet were raised by people from several midwestern parishes. The editors of Liguori Publications surfaced these questions as a way of giving voice to the concerns of laypeople interested in understanding what we do in prayer and how the Eucharist and eucharistic devo-

tions form the core of the spiritual renewal of the baptized community. In answering these questions, I used pastoral experience, Church documents, and common sense. A complete list of sources begins on page 91.

I hope my answers prompt further thinking about the questions, perhaps even dialogue with others who have interest in the Eucharist. I also hope that by understanding the eucharistic and devotional practices addressed by these questions, people will have a fuller and richer participation in the mystery of Christ and the Spirit at the heart of all prayer. Understanding what we do *as we do it* creates rich insight. Such attentive awareness allows God's voice to speak in the language of our lives and hearts.

RICHARD N. FRAGOMENI, PHD

AUGUST 1, 2008

THE FEAST OF SAINT ALPHONSUS LIGUORI



P a r t I

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS

1. What is spiritual communion?

Spiritual communion is a unique Roman Catholic devotional practice not to be confused with *sacramental* Communion, the participation in the mystery of Christ by eating and drinking the Body and the Blood of the Lord.

The development of spiritual communion as a devotion can be traced to Saint Alphonsus Liguori. Basically, it's a form of spiritual yearning to be in communion with Christ during those times when his sacramental gift cannot be shared.

To share in sacramental communion, one must be aware of no unconfessed serious sin against God's commands and be in good standing with the Roman Catholic Church. With exceptions for age and health, one must also have fasted from all food and all beverages except water for one hour before receiving sacramental Communion (also see question 46).

Some Catholics are unable to share sacramental Commu-

nion because of sickness, geographic distance from a Roman Catholic community, or unavailability of priests.

Any Christian who wishes to have spiritual communion with the Lord can do so by taking a moment to consider God's love demonstrated to us in the life, passion, and death of Christ. Give thanks to God for this wonderful gift, and say a prayer of spiritual communion such as this one written by Saint Alphonsus Liguori:

My Jesus, I believe you are really here
in the Blessed Sacrament.

I love you more than anything in the world,
and I hunger to receive you.

But since I cannot receive Communion at this
moment, feed my soul at least spiritually.

I unite myself to you now as I do
when I actually receive you.

Never let me drift away from you.

FROM *VISITS TO JESUS AND MARY*
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2. What is the symbolic relationship between the altar and the Eucharist?

The altar, also called the table of the Lord, is not just a piece of furniture. Our early Christian ancestors gathered at dining-room tables for the Eucharist, and through the centuries that simple piece of furniture came alive with deep meanings we still cherish.

It is from the altar that we share in the Eucharist, and the