

**Dear Friends in Christ,**

I like to read bulletins from other parishes to see what is going on in other parishes and to read what their priests have to say. They give me ideas about what to do in our parishes. One of things highly stressed in my Canon Law studies was that the Church is much larger than one's own parish. We can never allow ourselves to become too parochial or fixed on only what is going on in our parish. The Church is bigger than that and demands that we play a part in the wider community.

One of the bulletins I read lately was from St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Genoa, Wisconsin (my paternal family's home parish). The pastor, Father Nate Kuhn, wrote something that struck me during these days of pandemic: "We must first look at the Eucharist as a gift. It is truly a gift that we are able to come together as the Church and receive this gift of Bread from Heaven. Yet as with a gift, we can never demand it or feel as if we deserve it. But if we are being honest, none of us are worthy and none of us can say that we deserve to receive Christ in the Eucharist. In this way, when we are able to receive it, it is truly a special gift, a blessing."

While it is true that the Eucharist is the summit and source of all worship and Christian life and that the Church encourages all to receive it most devoutly and frequently, each of the faithful is obliged to receive Holy Communion only once a year. As you may know, during the Middle Ages, reception of Holy Communion was quite infrequent. It was during the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 that the rule of receiving once a year was implemented. While many saints of the time encouraged frequent reception of Holy Communion (such as St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure), others received quite infrequently, such as St. Louis who only communicated six times a year and St. Elizabeth of Hungary only three. Even religious did not receive Holy Communion very frequently at the time: the Poor Clares six times a year and the Dominican nuns only fifteen.

Aleteia news had an article about saints who were not able to receive the Eucharist very frequently. Hopefully the lives of these saints will help us persevere during this time of suspension of public Masses. After the martyrdom of Blessed James Zhou Wen-Mo in Korea in 1800, there were no Masses in Korea for 36 years for over 4000 Catholics until French priests came (who were later martyred as well). St. Mark Ji TianXiang (1834–1900) was an opium addict who was (wrongly) told by his priest that he couldn't be absolved until he had beaten his addiction—which meant that he couldn't receive communion either. For 30 years, TianXiang continued to practice the Faith while being denied the sacraments. He died never overcoming his addiction or receiving the sacraments. These are just two of the examples that the article gave.

While I certainly understand and realize many people's frustration during this time of suspension of Masses, we will come out of it in due time. We must continue to pray and practice the Faith as best we can at home. It is not what we are used to, and it is not necessarily ideal, but it is the best we all can do. Perhaps not all will agree, but I, along with countless others, are doing everything we can to make sure people stay safe and healthy. We will be together again at the table of the Lord and perhaps then we will be able to receive the Eucharist more as a gift, and not something we deserve.

**—Fr. Guanella**