



# A UNIQUE SPIRITUAL EVENT—YOUR CHILD'S **FIRST COMMUNION**

Christ gave us a precious gift when he instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper. Through this gift, he remains with each person in a very intimate way. For this reason, the day of your child's First Communion is an enormously important day in his or her life—and your life as well. Your child's enthusiasm and joy can increase your own, and vice-versa. And that joy can affect the entire parish community.

**You might think that your child's First Communion is mostly a family matter.**

But it is also a parish community matter, a major day in the life of a parish. Christians believe in the body of Christ. As Saint Paul taught us, we are all members of the body of Christ. Therefore we are all interconnected, and what brings joy to one brings joy to others in the body. And what could be more joyful than

being able to commune with Christ intimately through receiving his Body and Blood under the forms of bread and wine! No wonder most Catholic parishes have a wonderful celebration when their young parishioners make their First Communion!

When the Church was first instituted, members regarded each other as brothers and sisters. So it should be

for us today. First Communion day reminds all of us—whether we have children or not—that the Church is larger than any one family or any one age group. As such, we join with Christ in welcoming children to the table so that they can feast, along with you their parents and the rest of the community, on the Body and Blood of Christ, his great sacrament of love.



## A LITTLE HISTORY

**According to Acts 2:46, the first adult Christians received Communion every day.** In the early Church infants and young children often received Communion immediately after they were baptized. This was accomplished by permitting them to receive a drop of the consecrated wine on their tongues.

Over time, however, infants and young children were prohibited from receiving Communion, unless they were in danger of death. The reason for the change was that it was believed that the child receiving Communion had to be able to understand that the consecrated host is different from regular bread, and that the consecrated wine is not the same as that which his or her parents drink

at home; the child must be able to understand, at some level, that Jesus is really present in the bread and wine. Currently, the most common age at which children receive their First Communion is 2nd or 3rd grade (7-9 years of age).

Church law notes that First Communion should be held in the parish at a solemn but celebratory liturgy during the Easter season, the liturgical time of new life in Christ.

## YOU ARE YOUR CHILD'S FIRST TEACHER IN OUR FAITH!

**Young children learn much by what they see and hear important people in their lives doing and saying.** And parents are the most important people in young children's lives. Often, children learn more by observation than by what parents tell them. Don't ever underestimate the profound effect that your actions can have upon your child! For that reason, it is important to think about how you regard going to Mass (or attending Sunday worship service, if you are not Catholic) and receiving Communion. If you want this to be important to your child, then going to Mass and receiving Communion needs to be important to you. Is it something that you often do or rarely do? If rarely, why is that? Is it something that you do automatically, without much thought?

What would it mean for you to more carefully consider the great gift of love that the Eucharist truly is? How would it affect your own spiritual life? Worshiping God with others connects us not only to God but also to them. Receiving Communion with others does the same. This is not just a technical connection, but more

importantly a deeply spiritual and personal one that expresses itself in mutual care for one another. Children learn about this through class work and textbooks, and they learn it through seeing important adults in their lives behave according to their beliefs. What a powerful witness you can be to your child!



# Things you need to know

## YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

**If your child is a younger elementary school-age child at the time of his or her First Communion**, his intellectual and psychological development will play a large role in how he or she approaches First Communion.

Children at that age tend to be very literal; things are either up or down, right or wrong. There are no in-betweens! Some of this is just how children are made at this age, and some of it is due to the fact that, in school, there tends to be only right answers or wrong ones, especially on tests!

Hence, children of this age will approach the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ very literally. They might ask if the wine tastes like blood, or if the host tastes like skin. Do not be dismayed by such questions; they are normal. A very good feature of their literality is that they love Scripture stories, especially those that involve Jesus. They take Jesus at his word. They really enjoy Scripture stories in which good overcomes evil, and those stories in which magnificent deeds are done, such as stories about miracles.

Children know that to succeed in school or at sports they have to work



hard. The same is true if we want to develop our spiritual gifts. But if they think they have to work hard to earn the love of their parents, or to earn the love of Christ—that's simply not true.

They cannot lose Christ's love and they cannot earn it—they can only accept or reject it. You must always emphasize this, in order to avoid any misunderstanding on your child's part.

# FAQs

➔ ***When I made my First Communion, the girls wore white (with veils) and the boys wore suits. But my parish doesn't insist on any particular way of dress, just that the children are neat. Shouldn't the children dress like they always have done?***

The dress that you describe is that of the early-mid 20th century; it was never the subject of official Church teaching. There are currently two schools of thought on dress. One is that children should dress in a special way because it is such a special day. The other is that children should be neat and clean but less focused on how they look than on what is inside of them. Many parishes permit children to dress in clothing of their

choice, as long as the girls are in dresses and the boys are in jackets and slacks. Try not to give your child the impression that the clothing worn is the main part of receiving Communion. Christ comes to us all, just as we are.

➔ ***My son is asking the most bizarre questions. The other night, he asked if it hurt Jesus when we chewed him! He was serious! How do I explain that Christ is really present but not in a way that he will be hurt by chewing?***

Remember that a child of early elementary school age is very literal, so his questions will reflect that



literality. You can say something like this: "Do you remember that after Jesus died and rose, he could walk through a door without opening it when he wanted to be with his friends? Yet, he could still eat with them! Jesus' resurrected body is like our bodies in some ways, but not like our bodies in other ways. So we're not afraid that he will be hurt."

➔ ***I'm so afraid that my daughter will make a face when she receives the wine. We tried to give her wine at home, and she grimaced because she hates the taste of the wine. She said to us, "Why did Jesus make it be wine? Kids don't like the way wine tastes."***

Many Communion preparation programs permit the children to take a small sip of unconsecrated wine in order to prepare them for the taste of it, and we know from such programs that your daughter's reaction is the

