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## The Holy Eucharist: A Right or a Gift?

Archbishop Burke on Catholics who Support Abortion

Archbishop Burke Interview: The Holy Eucharist: A Right or a Gift?

By Thomas J. McKenna

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**Catholic Action for Faith and Family ([www.catholicaction.org/](http://www.catholicaction.org/))**

Archbishop Burke addresses the worthy reception of the Eucharist and the controversy of unfaithful Catholic politicians.

ROMA (Catholic Action for Faith and Family) - Catholic Action conducted an interview with Archbishop Raymond Burke, the courageous former Archbishop of Saint Louis and Bishop of La Crosse. Pope Benedict XVI thought so highly of the Archbishop that he appointed him the Prefect of the Apostolic Signatura on June 27, 2008. In effect, he is the Chief Justice of the International tribunal of the Catholic Church. This interview examines the pastoral aspects of Canon 915 and respect for the Holy Eucharist (Editor:

**Your Excellency, in today's world there seems to be a lax attitude regarding the reception of the Holy Eucharist. Why do you think this is and do you feel that this affects the faithful in the way they lead their lives as Catholics?**

One of the reasons I think that this laxity with regard to the Holy Eucharist has developed is that there has not been sufficient emphasis on Eucharistic devotion. Especially worship of the most Blessed Sacrament, through processions, Benediction

of the Blessed Sacrament, extended times of adoration and 40 Hours Devotion. Without devotion to the Blessed Sacrament people quickly lose Eucharistic faith.

We know that there is a high percentage of Catholics who do not believe that the Eucharistic species are the Body and Blood of Christ. We know too that there is an alarming percentage of Catholics who do not participate in Sunday Mass. Another aspect is a loss of the sense of connection between the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance.

In the past, perhaps there was an exaggerated emphasis to the point where people thought that each time they were going to receive Holy Communion, they had first to go to Confession, even though they had not committed an unconfessed mortal sin. But now people go to Communion regularly and perhaps never, or very seldom, go to Confession. They have lost the sense of their own unworthiness to approach the Sacrament and of the need to confess their sins and embrace repentance in order to receive Holy Communion worthily.

Also connected with this is a sense that has grown up from the civil sphere, which is that receiving Holy Communion is a right, that I, as a Catholic, have a right to receive Holy Communion. It is true that once we are baptized and reach the age of reason we should be prepared for Holy Communion, and, as often as we are well disposed, we should receive Holy Communion. On the other hand we never have a right to Holy Communion.

Who could claim that he has a right to receive the Body of Christ? This is all an act of God's immeasurable love. Our Lord makes Himself available to us in His Body and Blood for Holy Communion. But we can never say that we have the right to Him, that we can demand to receive Our Lord in Holy Communion. Each time we approach, we should approach with a profound sense of our own unworthiness.

These would just be some of the elements which I think have entered in and explain the lax attitude toward the Holy Eucharist, in general. We see this even in the way people dress for participation in Mass. For example, we see during Mass people going up to receive Holy Communion not folding their hands and even sometimes visiting with others along the way.

Some, even at the time they are actually receiving Holy Communion, do not show the proper reverence. All of these are indications of the need of a new evangelization regarding Eucharistic faith and practice. There are laws of the Church

to control inappropriate actions by the faithful for the good of the public. Could you please comment on this and explain to what degree the Church and the hierarchy have an obligation to intervene to clarify or correct issues.

With regard to the Holy Eucharist for instance, there are two canons in particular that have to do with the worthy reception of the sacrament. Canons 915 and 916. They have in mind two goods. One is the good of the person himself. To receive the Body and Blood of Christ unworthily is a sacrilege. To deliberately receive Holy Communion unworthily, when one is in the state of mortal sin, is a sacrilege. So, for the sake of the person himself, the Church has to instruct us that each time we are going to receive Holy Communion, we should first examine our conscience. If we have a mortal sin on our conscience, we should first confess that sin and receive absolution, and only then approach to receive the Sacrament.

Many times, our serious sins are hidden and only known to ourselves or maybe one or another person. In that case, we have to be the one to monitor the situation and discipline ourselves not to approach to receive Holy Communion. But there are other cases in which people are committing grave sins knowingly and publicly.

An example is a public official who knowingly and willingly supports actions which are against the Divine and Eternal moral law; for instance, to publicly promote procured abortion, which is the taking of innocent, defenseless human life. A person who is sinning in this way publicly is to be admonished not to receive Holy Communion until he has reformed his life. If a person, who has been admonished but persists in serious or mortal sin in a public way, receives Holy Communion, then the minister of Holy Communion has the obligation to refuse Holy Communion to that person.

Why? First of all, for the sake of the salvation of the person himself, lest he commit a sacrilege. But, secondly, for the sake of the whole Church, lest there be scandal in two ways. Number one, scandal regarding what our disposition should be to receive Holy Communion. In other words, people would be led to think it is alright to be in the state of mortal sin and to receive Our Lord in Holy Communion. Or it could be scandal, in a second way, in that people think that the public act which this person is committing, which everyone thinks is a serious sin, must not be so serious because the Church permits that person to receive Holy Communion.

If you have a public figure who is openly and deliberately supporting abortion rights,

and that same person approaches and receives Holy Communion, what are people to think? They could be led to imagine that somehow it is alright to support publicly the taking of innocent and defenseless lives in the womb. So the Church has these disciplines and they are very ancient. They actually go back to the times of St. Paul. But, throughout the Church's history, She has always had to discipline the reception of Holy Communion which is the most sacred treasure we have in the Church. It is the gift of the Body and Blood of Christ. The Church has always had to discipline the reception of Holy Communion so that, number one, people do not approach and receive Holy Communion unworthily to their own serious moral harm; and number two, the faith in the Eucharist is always respected, and members of the Church are not led into confusion, or even error, regarding the sacredness of the Sacrament or of the moral law.

There are instances of Catholic public officials who attend Mass, receive the sacraments and publicly declare they are Catholic, but who, in practice, support legislation that is contrary to Catholic morality. Some of them, as a type of disclaimer, state that they feel that they are not doing anything wrong according to their conscience and that it is a private matter. Can you please comment on how this is erroneous and how forming one's own conscience is not something subjective?

It is true that we must act in accord with the dictates of our conscience. But our conscience has to be properly formed. Our conscience must conform to the truth of situations. Conscience is not some sort of subjective reality where I make up for myself what is right and good. Rather, it is an objective reality where I conform my own thinking to what is true.

Sometimes people speak about their primacy of conscience in the sense that they say, "what ever I decide in my conscience, that is what I should do," and that rules the day. Of course that is true as long as the conscience is properly formed. I like something that Cardinal George Pell, the Archbishop of Sydney, has said. "Rather than talk about the primacy of conscience, we should talk about the primacy of truth," the truth of God's moral law to which our conscience needs to be conformed. Once it is properly informed, then of course, conscience has the primacy that is ascribed to it.

**Some people say that it is a right to receive Holy Communion and that no one else has the right to tell another not to receive the Sacrament. Not**

**even a bishop, priest or minister. What would you respond to them?**

In responding to this question, the first thing that needs to be said is that the Body and Blood of Christ is a gift of God's love to us. It is the greatest gift, a gift beyond our ability to describe. No one, therefore, has a right to the gift. Just as we don't have a right to any gift that is given to us. A gift is freely given out of love and that is what God is doing for us every time we are able to participate in Mass and approach to receive Holy Communion. So to say that I have a right to receive Holy Communion is not correct.

If one means by this that, if he is well disposed and the Mass is being offered, he has a right to receive Holy Communion in the sense that he has a right to receive. Yes, that is true. Now, regarding the reception of Holy Communion, there is Our Lord Himself who is involved. There is the person who is receiving Holy Communion. Then there is the minister of the Sacrament, the one who has the responsibility to make sure that the Sacrament is distributed only to those who are properly disposed. Certainly the Church does have the right to tell someone who persists in public grave sin that he may receive Holy Communion because he is not well disposed. That right of the minister to refuse to give Holy Communion to someone who persists in public and grave sin is safe guarded in the Code of Canon Law, under canon 915.

Otherwise the minister of Communion would be put in the situation of violating his conscience regarding a most serious matter, when he sees a notorious sinner coming to receive Holy Communion to the scandal of everyone, and he is somehow told he does not have the right to refuse to give Holy Communion, in such a circumstance. That simply would be wrong.

The enforcement of compliance with Church law by a bishop, priest or even a Vatican office oftentimes seems to be perceived by some as a mean act or even bullying of the faithful. Many people seem to forget that the Church considers that when a person is not in a worthy state to receive the Holy Eucharist, generally it is because they are in a state of mortal sin which is very serious and directly related to their eternal salvation.

**It seems that when a bishop or priest enters into dialogue or takes disciplinary measures with a sinner, it is a mercy. That this is an outreach of the bishop or priest which is an obligation they have to the faithful**

**under their care. To try to bring them back into the fold. For this reason the Church has these laws. Can you please comment on this aspect of ministry?**

I certainly agree with this. It is the greatest act of charity to prevent somebody from doing something that is sacrilegious that is, to warn them, and then actually refuse to be party to a sacrilege. It is analogous to a parent whose child wants to play with fire and the parent refuses to let him. We would not say that somehow the parent is being unkind to the child by disciplining him. We would say this parent is truly a loving parent. In the same way the Church, in Her love, prevents people from doing things that are gravely offensive to God and gravely damaging to their own souls.

**Your Excellency, some say that when a member of the Catholic hierarchy publicly admonishes a Catholic, who holds a position of public office, he is using his influence to interfere in politics. How would you respond to this?**

The Bishop or Church authority, it could be the parish priest, who intervenes in such situations, is dealing solely with the good of the soul of the politician or public figure who is involved. This has nothing to do with trying to influence public policy and has to do with the state of the soul of a politician or public official who happens to be Catholic and, therefore is held in the public sphere to follow the divine moral law. If he does not, he should be admonished by his pastor.

So, to try to silence a shepherd from doing what is for the good of the soul of a member of the flock by telling him that it is interfering in politics is simply ridiculous and wrong. This also flows from something that His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI recently addressed with the bishops of the United States and, that is, the desire of certain people in our society to relegate religious faith completely to a private sphere and to say that it has nothing to do with the public square. That is simply wrong.

We have to give witness to our faith not only in that part of our lives that we live in the privacy of our homes, but also in our public interaction with others to give a strong witness to Christ. So we have to break down that idea that somehow our religious faith is some completely private matter and has nothing to do with our public life.

**This interview is republished from "Catholic Action for Faith and Family", an association of Catholics that strives to uphold and defend Christian values inspired by the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church who reserve the rights .<http://www.catholicaction.org>**

## Archbishop Burke on Catholics who Support Abortion

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**Catholic News Agency ([www.catholicnewsagency.com](http://www.catholicnewsagency.com))**

He referred to "public officials who, with knowledge and consent, uphold actions that are against the Divine and Eternal moral law. For example, if they support abortion"

ROME (CNA) - The prefect of the Apostolic Signature, Archbishop Raymond Burke, said this week that Catholics, especially politicians who publically defend abortion, should not receive Communion, and that ministers of Communion should be responsibly charitable in denying it to them if they ask for it, "until they have reformed their lives."

In an interview with the magazine, Radici Cristiane, Archbishop Burke pointed out that there is often a lack of reverence at Mass when receiving Communion. "Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ unworthily is a sacrilege," he warned. "If it is done deliberately in mortal sin it is a sacrilege."

To illustrate his point, he referred to "public officials who, with knowledge and consent, uphold actions that are against the Divine and Eternal moral law. For example, if they support abortion, which entails the taking of innocent and defenseless human lives. A person who commits sin in this way should be publicly admonished in such a way as to not receive Communion until he or she has reformed his life," the archbishop said.

"If a person who has been admonished persists in public mortal sin and attempts to receive Communion, the minister of the Eucharist has the obligation to deny it to

him. Why? Above all, for the salvation of that person, preventing him from committing a sacrilege," he added.

"We must avoid giving people the impression that one can be in a state of mortal sin and receive the Eucharist," the archbishop continued. "Secondly, there could be another form of scandal, consisting of leading people to think that the public act that this person is doing, which until now everyone believed was a serious sin, is really not that serious - if the Church allows him or her to receive Communion."

"If we have a public figure who is openly and deliberately upholding abortion rights and receiving the Eucharist, what will the average person think? He or she could come to believe that it up to a certain point it is okay to do away with an innocent life in the mother's womb," he warned.

Archbishop Burke also noted that when a bishop or a Church leader prevents an abortion supporter from receiving Communion, "it is not with the intention of interfering in public life but rather in the spiritual state of the politician or public official who, if Catholic, should follow the divine law in the public sphere as well."

"Therefore, it is simply ridiculous and wrong to try to silence a pastor, accusing him of interfering in politics so that he cannot do good to the soul of a member of his flock," he stated.

It is "simply wrong" to think that the faith must be reduced to the private sphere and eliminated from public life, Archbishop Burke said, encouraging Catholics "to bear witness to our faith not only in private in our homes but also in our public lives with others in order to bear strong witness to Christ."