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*“If you are the body and members of Christ, then it is your sacrament that is placed on the table of the Lord; it is your sacrament that you receive. To that which you are you respond ‘Amen’ (‘yes, it is true!’) and by responding to it you assent to it. For you hear the words, ‘the Body of Christ’ and respond ‘Amen.’ Be then a member of the Body of Christ that your Amen may be true.”*  
— Saint Augustine

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Do I enter the celebration of the Mass with a longing for God, desiring not just the fulfillment of an obligation but a deeper communion? Do I love my neighbor, whoever that is, with fervor of heart?

## THE COMMUNION RITE

After the Eucharistic prayer, the Church begins the celebration of the Communion rite. Based solely on context, we might see this moment as an occasion to prepare the individual alone to receive Christ’s Body and Blood. But this is not sufficient. Rather, it is through this personal reception of Christ’s Body and Blood that the Church comes together, remembering once more that she is made to offer this communion of love to the whole human family.

The Church begins the Communion rite by praying the Our Father. The words given to us by Jesus demand that we address God not in the first person singular but plural. God is the Father of the entire human family, who gives each of us our daily bread, and who asks that we dwell together in a communion of love. We are to forgive one another each day, just as God forgives us. To receive divine forgiveness means to offer it to the entire human family.

The sign of peace takes up this call

to communion. The sign of peace is not just a moment to kiss our spouse and children. Instead, the sign of peace is the call to become the communion, the total gift of love, that we are to receive. If we want to receive Christ’s love, we must create a space in our hearts for love of the entire human family.

At this point in the Mass, we begin to prepare to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. To sing a hymn to the Lamb of God is an act of faith. What we see on the altar looks like bread and wine. But here is the Lamb of God, who shed his blood for the human family. We are called to a supper, a feast, not ordered toward drunkenness or violence. It is the feast of those who are assembled through the peaceable love of the Lamb once slain.

Of course, none of us are worthy of this love, of this communion that draws us into union with God and with one another. For this reason, we ask that just as Jesus descended into the home of the man incapable of walking, Jesus might enter into our home.

Now, we each receive Christ’s Body and Blood. The Church requires that we receive this Body and Blood without sin, not because Jesus can’t handle sin. Rather, we are receiving the totality of love, the kind of love that is meant to find a space in the human heart. If we receive this love without awareness of what we’re doing, cut off from communion with the Church, then we can’t benefit from this gift.

This point of Mass necessitates and requires a bit of silence. This is not the silence of an individual, sitting all by him or herself. Rather, it is a common

silence, the silence of those who reflect together on the gift of love they have received.

We then conclude this moment of silence with a prayer, a blessing, and then are sent off to adore the living God in the world. Having received this gift of communion, we are meant to become this communion to our brothers and sisters in need. For many of us, this need will start right away. It will be our children who demand lunch right after Mass. It will be our spouse inflicted by dementia who needs us to sit in their presence.

For others, we’ll need to go to places where such love can be offered. We’ll have to work on it, asking for grace from God through further prayer. We’ll love the co-worker who is annoying. We’ll offer gratitude or forgiveness where it’s the hardest.

The communion of the Mass is not meant just to affect us individually. We are called to offer our lives back to God, to make our whole life into a Eucharistic sacrifice.

## DISPOSED FOR COMMUNION

In some ways, the reception of Communion is the most intimate moment of the Mass. It is personal, allowing each of us to experience the fruits of Jesus’ sacrifice on our very lips. We eat and drink the presence of the living God.

But such communion is not just about an individual experience, an interior delight unfolding apart from the rest of the human family. The Church, having feasted on the Body and Blood of Christ, now become for the world a sacrifice of praise.

