



**Fœderatio Internationalis *Una Voce***

***Positio N. 10***

THE EUCHARISTIC FAST

AUGUST 2012

### From the General Introduction

These papers, commissioned by the International Federation *Una Voce*, are offered to stimulate and inform debate about the 1962 Missal among Catholics ‘attached to the ancient Latin liturgical tradition’, and others interested in the liturgical renewal of the Church. They are not to be taken to imply personal or moral criticism of those today or in the past who have adopted practices or advocated reforms which are subjected to criticism. In composing these papers we adopt the working assumption that our fellow Catholics act in good will, but that nevertheless a vigorous and well-informed debate is absolutely necessary if those who act in good will are to do so in light of a proper understanding of the issues.

The authors of the papers are not named, as the papers are not the product of any one person, and also because we prefer them to be judged on the basis of their content, not their authorship.

The International Federation *Una Voce* humbly submits the opinions contained in these papers to the judgement of the Church.

### The Eucharistic Fast: Abstract

From the earliest times Holy Communion has been received fasting, and a fast from midnight, or even longer, was normative for many centuries. Pope Pius XII reduced the fast to three hours, to make possible the celebration of Mass in the evenings. Pope Paul VI, while emphasising the importance of a spiritual preparation for a fruitful reception, reduced it to one hour in 1964. Blessed Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have both noted the development of a casual attitude towards the reception of Holy Communion. A possibility to be seriously considered, to counteract this, would be the restoration of Pope Pius XII’s three-hour fast. The minor inconvenience experienced by the Faithful, and occasional necessity of not receiving Holy Communion, would underline the importance and value of the Blessed Sacrament, would counteract the tendency to go forward to Holy Communion just because others are, would restore the ‘hunger and thirst’ for Holy Communion desired by Bl. Pope John Paul II, and would encourage the practice of making a Spiritual Communion, praised by both Bl. Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI.

*Comments can be sent to*

**positio@fiuv.org**

## FIUV Position Paper: The Eucharistic Fast

- As well as issues pertaining specifically to the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite, in respects in which it differs from the Ordinary Form, the topics of these papers include those which, at least in principle, apply to the Ordinary Form (such as Liturgical Orientation,<sup>1</sup> or the Manner of Receiving Communion)<sup>2</sup>, or which apply to the Ordinary Form to some degree (such as Silence,<sup>3</sup> or Gregorian Chant).<sup>4</sup> In this paper we address something which is connected with the special character of the Extraordinary Form, but which applies to all Catholics of the Latin Rite by virtue of Canon Law, namely the Eucharistic Fast.

### A Historical Review of the Fast

- Tertullian tells us that the Blessed Sacrament is taken ‘before all other food’.<sup>5</sup> A fast from midnight is implicit in the practice of celebrating Mass before dawn, which became established in the second century,<sup>6</sup> and this fast became widely established,<sup>7</sup> although in the Middle Ages much longer fasts were often enforced,<sup>8</sup> not only from food and water, but from marital relations.<sup>9</sup> The fast was not required of the infirm.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Positio 5: ‘Liturgical Orientation’

<sup>2</sup> Positio 3: ‘The Manner of Receiving Communion’

<sup>3</sup> Positio 9: ‘Silence in the Extraordinary Form’

<sup>4</sup> Forthcoming.

<sup>5</sup> The phrase ‘ante omnem cibum’, used by Tertullian (*Ad Uxorem* II, 5: PL 1, 1296) could also be translated ‘before every meal’, and it has been suggested that the Eucharist was taken before meals as an antidote to poison. See discussions in Fr Alphonse Sammut *The Eucharistic Fast in the Light of the Last Papal Documents* (Rome: Miscellania Francescana, 1959) pp14-15, and Fr Joseph Jungmann SJ *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development* (New York: Benzinger, 1955 (English Edition)) Vol. II p366, note 34. On this interpretation it would still indicate that Holy Communion was received before, rather than at the end of, a meal.

<sup>6</sup> An annual exception to the rule of morning Masses was made, for some centuries, for Maundy Thursday, which meant that on that day Holy Communion had to be received without fasting: see for example the Third Council of Carthage (397) canon 29: ‘No-one may celebrate the sacrament of the Altar unless fasting, except on the one day the Supper of the Lord is celebrated.’ (‘Ut sacramenta altaris nonnisi a ieunis hominibus celebrentur, except uno die in quo coena Domini celebrantur.’) The Council of Braga in 572 condemned this exception: see Sammut *op. cit.* pp28-29.

<sup>7</sup> See St Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* 3a Pars Q80 a.8 Ad5: ‘That this sacrament ought to enter into the mouth of a Christian before any other food must not be understood absolutely of all time, otherwise he who had once eaten or drunk could never afterwards take this sacrament: but it must be understood of the same day; and although the beginning of the day varies according to different systems of reckoning (for some begin their day at noon, some at sunset, others at midnight, and others at sunrise), the Roman Church begins it at midnight. Consequently, if any person takes anything by way of food or drink after midnight, he may not receive this sacrament on that day; but he can do so if the food was taken before midnight.’ (‘cum dicitur, hoc sacramentum prius quam alii cibi debet mitti in os Christiani, non est intelligendum absolute respectu totius temporis, alioquin qui semel comedisset et bibisset, nunquam postea posset hoc sacramentum accipere. Sed est intelligendum quantum ad eundem diem. Et licet principium diei secundum diversos diversimode sumatur, nam quidam a meridie, quidam ab occasu, quidam a media nocte, quidam ab ortu solis diem incipiunt; Ecclesia tamen, secundum Romanos, diem a media nocte incipit. Et ideo, si post medianum noctem aliquis sumpserit aliquid per modum cibi vel potus, non potest eadem die hoc sumere sacramentum, potest vero si ante medianum noctem.’)

<sup>8</sup> Jungmann *op. cit.* Vol. II p363-364

<sup>9</sup> Jungmann *op. cit.* Vol. II p363 note 23

<sup>10</sup> Sammut *op. cit.* p29; see also below.

Although contrary to the example of the Last Supper,<sup>11</sup> feeding of the fasting Faithful is suggested by the strongly Eucharistic typology of the Feeding of the Five Thousand.<sup>12</sup>

3. The frequency of reception by the Faithful seems to have declined drastically from the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, despite periodic exhortations to the contrary.<sup>13</sup> A decisive change came with Pope St Pius X, under whom a decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Council condemned lingering Jansenist errors on the subject and clarified the conditions for fruitful reception.<sup>14</sup> Pope St Pius X also encouraged a much earlier time for First Communions, and introduced more generous dispensations for certain difficult circumstances. Pope Pius XII introduced a fast of three hours, which was not broken by ‘natural water’ (i.e. water without additives), at first under various conditions in 1953, and then as a general discipline in his Motu Proprio *Sacram Communionem* (1957),<sup>15</sup> with generous provision for the ‘infirm’.<sup>16</sup>
4. In 1964 Pope Paul VI reduced the fast to one hour, to be calculated from the time of reception, for both priests and faithful;<sup>17</sup> this rule was reiterated in the 1983 Code of Canon Law.<sup>18</sup>

#### The Fast and Reverence for the Sacrament

5. Pope Paul VI’s Instruction on Holy Communion, *Immensa caritatis* (1973) emphasises the ‘supreme reverence due to so great a Sacrament’, and in a footnote to this phrase gives a long quotation from the Council of Trent, insisting on the necessity for sacramental confession before reception in case the recipient, lay or clerical, should be conscious of mortal sin. The quotation begins:

It is unfitting to take part in any sacred function without holiness. Assuredly, therefore, the more that Christians perceive the sacredness and divinity of this heavenly sacrament, the more must they take every care not to come to receive it without reverence and holiness, especially since we have the frightening words of St. Paul: ‘For those who eat and drink unworthily, eat and drink damnation to themselves, not discerning the Lord’s body’ (1 Cor 11:29). Those wishing to

---

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 26.26: ‘whilst they were at supper, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke: and gave to his disciples, and said: Take ye, and eat. This is my body’; Mark 14.22: ‘And whilst they were eating, Jesus took bread; and blessing, broke, and gave to them, and said: Take ye. This is my body.’ Cf. 1 Corinthians 11.18-30, on the connection between the Eucharist and the ‘Agape meal’ in the primitive Church.

<sup>12</sup> Mark 6.34-44, Luke 9.11-17, John 6.4-13

<sup>13</sup> Jungmann *op. cit.* Vol. II pp360-362

<sup>14</sup> Sacred Congregation for the Implementation of the Council of Trent, Decree *Sacra Tridentina Synodus*, (1905): see Appendix A.

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix C.

<sup>17</sup> 21 November 1964 *Tempus Eucharistici ieunii servandi reducitur*, (AAS 57 (1965) 186): ‘In view of the difficulties felt in many countries concerning the Eucharistic fast, the Supreme Pontiff, graciously acceding to the petitions of the Bishops, grants that the fast from solid foods be reduced to one hour before Communion, for both priests and the faithful. In this grant is included also the use of alcoholic drinks, observing, however, due moderation.’ (‘Attentis multarum regionum difficultatibus quoad ieunium eucharisticum, Summus Pontifex, petitionibus Episcoporum benigne annuens, concedit ut ieunium quoad cibos solidos reducatur ad unam horam ante Sanctam Communionem, et quidem tum pro sacerdotibus tum pro fidelibus. In hac autem concessione includitur quoque potuum alcholicorum usus, servata tamen debita moderatione.’) *Osservatore Romano*, 4 December 1964, 2.

<sup>18</sup> 1983 Code of Canon Law, Canon 919 § 1: ‘A person who is to receive the Most Holy Eucharist is to abstain for at least one hour before holy communion from any food and drink, except for only water and medicine.’ (“Sanctissimam Eucharistiam recepturus per spatum saltem unius horae ante sacram communionem abstineat quocumque cibo et potu, excepta tantummodo aqua atque medicina.”)

receive communion must be reminded of St. Paul's command: 'Let a man examine himself' (1 Cor 11:28).<sup>19</sup>

6. That irreverence for the Blessed Sacrament has arisen among the Faithful was noted with deep concern by Blessed Pope John Paul II in *Dominicae Cenae* (1980), where he described two contrasting phenomena. First, while the scrupulosity which discouraged frequent Communion in former times has largely disappeared, members of the Faithful neglecting opportunities to receive Holy Communion are still to be found, due to a lack of Eucharistic 'hunger' and 'thirst', which is also a sign of lack of adequate sensitivity towards the great sacrament of love and a lack of understanding of its nature.<sup>20</sup>

7. Secondly,

Sometimes, indeed quite frequently, everybody participating in the eucharistic assembly goes to Communion; and on some such occasions, as experienced pastors confirm, there has not been due care to approach the sacrament of Penance so as to purify one's conscience.<sup>21</sup>

This is the result of a lack of 'the good quality of sensitiveness of Christian conscience'.<sup>22</sup> Pope Benedict XVI has also lamented the second attitude.<sup>23</sup>

8. Both Bl. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, in the passages just noted, go on to discuss the reception of Communion in the Hand, which they link to the problem of a lack of reverence towards the Blessed Sacrament. This issue is discussed in another paper.<sup>24</sup> Our concern here is with the possibility of addressing the problem they identify by another means: by reconsidering the discipline of the Eucharistic Fast.

### Restoring the discipline of Pope Pius XII

9. Requiring an extended period of fasting before the reception of Holy Communion is a natural and traditional way to underline the great significance of the Blessed Sacrament, just as Pope Benedict XVI talks of marking it with 'an exclamation point' by his own practice of giving it only on the tongue, to kneeling communicants.<sup>25</sup> It would oblige all

---

<sup>19</sup> Council of Trent, sess. 13, cap. 7: 'Si non decet ad sacras ulla functiones quempiam accedere nisi sancte, certe, quo magis sanctitas et divinitas coelestis hujus sacramenti viro Christiano comperta est, eo diligentius cavere ille debet, ne absque magna reverentia et sanctitate ad id percipiendum accedat, praesertim cum illa plena formidinis verba apud apostolum legamus: Qui manducat et bibit indigne, iudicium sibi manducat et bibit, non dijudicans corpus Domini. Quare communicare volenti revocandum est in memoriam ejus praeceptum: Probet autem seipsum homo.'

<sup>20</sup> Bl. Pope John Paul II Letter (1980) *Dominicae Cenae* 11: 'deficiente "fame" et "siti" eucharistica, sub qua latet similiter parum sufficiens aestimatio atque intellegentia ipsius naturae huius excellentis Sacramenti amoris.'

<sup>21</sup> Ibid: 'Interdum scilicet, immo compluribus in casibus, cuncti eucharisticae celebrationis participes ad communionem accedunt, tametsi nonnumquam - ut comprobant periti rerum pastores - habita non est debita cura, ut prius Paenitentiae Sacramentum reciperent propriam ad conscientiam mundandam.'

<sup>22</sup> Ibid: 'bonum quod subtilitas est christiana conscientiae impulsae.'

<sup>23</sup> Peter Seewald and Pope Benedict XVI *The Light of the World: the Pope, the Church and the Signs of the Times* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2010) p156: 'There is a great danger of superficiality [in the reception of Holy Communion] precisely in the kinds of mass events we hold at St Peter's... In this context, where people think that everyone is just automatically supposed to receive Communion—everyone else is going up, so I will, too—I wanted to send a clear signal... This is not just some social ritual in which we can take part if we want to.' Cf. the quotation from Pope Benedict XVI's Post-Synodal Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007) in note 25 below.

<sup>24</sup> Positio 4: 'The Manner of Receiving Communion', esp. 5-8

<sup>25</sup> Seewald and Pope Benedict *op. cit.* p156

the Faithful to think more seriously about receiving, requiring forethought, and on occasion some limited, but symbolically expressive, sacrifice. Furthermore, while it will on occasion require some practical adjustments (to the timing of services or meals, for example), it does not present the same psychological problem at the moment of reception as would withdrawal of permission for Communion in the Hand.

10. A fast from midnight is the practice most hallowed by centuries of observance, but its reimposition today would clearly create practical difficulties. These would particularly affect those attached to the Extraordinary Form, which is frequently offered at less than ideal times, when priests or churches happen to be free. Instead, we would like to suggest the restoration of the discipline established by Pope Pius XII, of a three hour fast.
11. The decline in the frequency of reception of Holy Communion noted in §3 resulted from a deeper appreciation of the supernatural reality of the Blessed Sacrament, coupled with the development of penitential discipline. The Eucharistic Fast was also more emphasised, but these fasts were frequently required before attendance at Mass, at least on Sundays and Feasts, even if Holy Communion was not received,<sup>26</sup> so they posed no additional obstacle to reception. More frequent Confession offered a solution to concerns about the worthiness of communicants, but this required a degree of infrastructure and catechesis which took time to establish.<sup>27</sup>
12. Pope St Pius X saw the greatest obstacle to frequent Communion, in the early 20th Century, not as the midnight fast, but in confusion about the spiritual conditions needed for a worthy reception. Pope Pius XII's purpose in changing the rules was not so much to make the fast easier, but to make Mass at different times of day possible, facilitating its incorporation into a working or a school day.<sup>28</sup>
13. While the demandingness of Pope Pius XII's discipline should not be exaggerated, it would mean that, from time to time, for practical reasons reception would be difficult or impossible for some people. This would itself be useful in counteracting the tendency, noted by both Bl. Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI as noted in paragraph 7 above, of members of the Faithful approaching Holy Communion just because everyone else is doing so; indeed, to fail to go forward to receive Holy Communion risks drawing

---

<sup>26</sup> Jungmann *op. cit.* Vol II p366: ‘All through the Middle Ages the precept of fasting was not only strictly adhered to with regard to Holy Communion, but was even repeatedly prescribed for attendance at Mass (as in a synod of Brixen as late as 1453), or at least it was counselled for Mass.’ This is less surprising when one considers the great significance ascribed to gazing on the Host and to Spiritual Communions, discussed by Jungmann in the preceding pages, in the context of very infrequent Sacramental Communion. Cf. Eamon Duffy *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional religion in England c.1400-c.1580* (New Haven: Yale, 1992): on fasting before Mass, p42; ‘Seeing the Host’ pp95-102.

<sup>27</sup> Duffy notes the great organisational and catechetical effort required to implement the decision of Lateran IV (1215) that all Catholics should confess and communicate once a year. The existence of the mendicant orders was an enormous help in making this possible, and the development of the parochial system in the preceding centuries was essential: Duffy *op. cit.* pp53-56; 93-94. Cf. Jungmann *op. cit.* Vol II p363: ‘But in the Middle Ages, with the prevailing parish restrictions and the often insufficient organization of the cure of souls, not only was there no willingness, but to a great extent there was no possibility to confess and thus to communicate frequently.’

<sup>28</sup> Sammut *op. cit.* p101: ‘Evening Masses were beyond doubt the greatest benefit and the most extensive concession issuing from the documents [sc. *Christus Dominus* (1953) and *Sacram Communionem* (1957)].’ The three-hour fast facilitated reception at Masses which had to be scheduled after breakfast, such as at day schools and the main Masses in Parishes, as well as evening Masses.

attention to oneself, or even of giving scandal.<sup>29</sup> Those unable to receive would instead make a ‘Spiritual Communion’, a practice encouraged by Bl. Pope John Paul II, who quoted St Teresa’s praise of it,<sup>30</sup> and again by Pope Benedict XVI,<sup>31</sup> who asked the participants at the Papal Mass at World Youth Day Madrid to make a Spiritual Communion when general distribution was impossible.<sup>32</sup> This practice fosters the ‘hunger and thirst’ for the Eucharist Bl. Pope John Paul II so desired.

### Conclusion

14. Although it might seem a radical proposal, the restoration of the former discipline would be a relatively simple means of underlining the value of the Blessed Sacrament, and the importance of preparation for it. The current problem of casual attitudes towards Holy Communion demands comprehensive catechesis, and the three-hour fast would itself be a form of catechesis, something which emphasised the supernatural reality of the Blessed Sacrament, perhaps more forcefully than a merely verbal exhortation.

---

<sup>29</sup> Dr Edward Peters ‘The Communion Fast: a Reconsideration’ *Antiphon* 11.3 (2007) pp234-244, p243: the current short fast ‘deprives those with troubled consciences of an unobtrusive way to avoid approaching the Body and Blood of the Lord in a state that risks profanation (1 Cor 11:27).’

<sup>30</sup> Bl. John Paul II Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003) 34: ‘it is good to cultivate in our hearts a constant desire for the sacrament of the Eucharist. This was the origin of the practice of “spiritual communion”, which has happily been established in the Church for centuries and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life. Saint Teresa of Jesus wrote: “When you do not receive communion and you do not attend Mass, you can make a spiritual communion, which is a most beneficial practice; by it the love of God will be greatly impressed on you” ’ (‘opportunum est continuatum Sacramenti eucharisticici desiderium alere. Inde “communionis spiritualis” orta est consuetudo, quae feliciter complura iam saecula in Ecclesia viget quaeque a vitae spiritalis Sanctis magistris commendatur. Sancta Teresia a Iesu scripsit: “Cum communionem non sumitis neque Missae estis participes potestis spiritaliter communicare, id quod est valde frugiferum... Sic Domini nostri amor multum in vobis imprimatur” ’) (The internal quotation from St Teresa comes from her ‘Camino de Perfección’ Ch 35)

<sup>31</sup> Pope Benedict XVI Post-Synodal Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007) 55: ‘Clearly, full participation in the Eucharist takes place when the faithful approach the altar in person to receive communion. Yet true as this is, care must be taken lest they conclude that the mere fact of their being present in church during the liturgy gives them a right or even an obligation to approach the table of the Eucharist. Even in cases where it is not possible to receive sacramental communion, participation at Mass remains necessary, important, meaningful and fruitful. In such circumstances it is beneficial to cultivate a desire for full union with Christ through the practice of spiritual communion, praised by Pope John Paul II and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life.’ (‘Sine dubio plena participatio Eucharistiae habetur cum quis accedit etiam personaliter ad altare Communionis recipiendae gratia.(169) Attamen cavendum est ne haec iusta affirmatio forsitan introducat inter fideles quendam automatismum, quasi quispiam ob solam praesentiam in ecclesia, liturgiae tempore, ius habeat, vel forsitan etiam officium, ad Mensam eucharisticam accedendi. Etiam cum non datur facultas ad sacramentalem communionem accedendi, participatio Sanctae Missae manet necessaria, valida, significans et fructuosa. Bonum est his in rerum adiunctis desiderium plene cum Christo coniunctionis colere per consuetudinem exempli gratia communionis spiritalis, memoratae a Joanne Paulo II et commendatae a Sanctis vitae spiritalis moderatoribus.’) The passage refers to Bl. John Paul II *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003) 34, quoted in the preceding note.

<sup>32</sup> After a storm had rendered unsafe many of the tents used to store consecrated hosts for distribution at the Papal Mass due to take place on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2011, only a fraction of the congregation, of over a million people, were able to receive Holy Communion. The others were encouraged to make a Spiritual Communion. The Vatican spokesman Fr Frederico Lombardi later commented: ‘This helped us to remember the precious words from a recent document by the Pope, which warn that, “Care must be taken lest [the faithful] conclude that the mere fact of their being present in church during the liturgy gives them a right or even an obligation to approach the table of the Eucharist. Even in cases where it is not possible to receive sacramental Communion, participation at Mass remains necessary, important, meaningful and fruitful.” In these circumstances we have to “cultivate the desire for full union with Christ,” by making ‘spiritual Communion’ as ancient and beautiful tradition puts it. ...the intense desire to be united with Him is also an effective source of communion.’ Zenit, 4<sup>th</sup> September 2011.

15. It should not be assumed that increasing the onerousness of the discipline of the Church will lead to a rejection of that discipline, or even lapsation. A serious form of discipline indicates the seriousness of the subject of the discipline, and more demanding religions have frequently attracted more adherents than laxer ones.<sup>33</sup> A voluntary adoption by members of the Faithful of a more rigorous fast would not have this catechetical power; nor would it gain merit as an exercise of obedience. A public campaign to encourage such a voluntary practice might even invite accusations of Phariseeism.
16. It must be said finally that the current discipline, of a fast of one hour before reception, scarcely impinges on the Faithful;<sup>34</sup> as such it is less likely to be remembered or taken seriously, and insisting upon a trivial obligation seems less than reasonable.<sup>35</sup> To restore a proper respect for the Eucharist, an obligation to fast which demands respect is surely necessary.

---

<sup>33</sup> Mark van Vugt and Anjana Ahuja *Selected: Why some people lead, why others follow, and why it matters* (London: High Profile Books, 2010) p85 ‘Paradoxically, the costlier the rituals associated with a belief system, the more enduring it is. One study of religious communes in 19th century America showed that those making the most extreme demands on their followers—giving up worldly goods, celibacy, shunning contact with outsiders, relinquishing certain foods and alcohol—were the most enduring.’ The authors cite a number of studies bearing out this generalisation.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Dr Edward Peters *op. cit.* p241: ‘If, as a millennium and a half suggest, some significant level of corporal fasting is conducive to the worthy reception of the Eucharist, it must be frankly admitted that such a state cannot be accomplished in one hour’s time.’ Dr Peters goes on to suggest (p243) that a three-hour fast be restored, but calculated from the start of Mass, for the sake of certainty about when the fast needs to begin.

<sup>35</sup> Dr Peter *ibid.* p236: ‘Pointless observances should not be the subject of legislation lest contempt for the law arise.’

Appendix A: *Sacra Tridentina Synodus*,

a decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, under Pope Pius X, 1905 (extract)

1. Frequent and daily Communion, as a practice most earnestly desired by Christ our Lord and by the Catholic Church, should be open to all the faithful, of whatever rank and condition of life; so that no one who is in the state of grace, and who approaches the Holy Table with a right and devout intention (*recta piaque mente*) can be prohibited therefrom.
2. A right intention consists in this: that he who approaches the Holy Table should do so, not out of routine, or vain glory, or human respect, but that he wish to please God, to be more closely united with Him by charity, and to have recourse to this divine remedy for his weakness and defects.
3. Although it is especially fitting that those who receive Holy Communion frequently or daily should be free from venial sins, at least from such as are fully deliberate, and from any affection thereto, nevertheless, it is sufficient that they be free from mortal sin, with the purpose of never sinning in the future; and if they have this sincere purpose, it is impossible that daily communicants should not gradually free themselves even from venial sins, and from all affection thereto.
4. Since, however, the Sacraments of the New Law, though they produce their effect *ex opere operato*, nevertheless, produce a great effect in proportion as the dispositions of the recipient are better, therefore, one should take care that Holy Communion be preceded by careful preparation, and followed by an appropriate thanksgiving, according to each one's strength, circumstances and duties.
5. That the practice of frequent and daily Communion may be carried out with greater prudence and more fruitful merit, the confessor's advice should be asked. Confessors, however, must take care not to dissuade anyone from frequent or daily Communion, provided he is found to be in a state of grace and approaches with a right intention.
6. But since it is plain that by the frequent or daily reception of the Holy Eucharist union with Christ is strengthened, the spiritual life more abundantly sustained, the soul more richly endowed with virtues, and the pledge of everlasting happiness more securely bestowed on the recipient, therefore, parish priests, confessors and preachers, according to the approved teaching of the Roman Catechism should exhort the faithful frequently and with great zeal to this devout and salutary practice.

Appendix B: *Sacram Communionem*

a Motu Proprio of Pope Pius XII, 1957 (extract)

1. Ordinaries of places, excluding vicars general who are not in possession of a special mandate, may permit Holy Mass to be celebrated every day after midday, should this be necessary for the spiritual welfare of a considerable number of the faithful.
2. Priests and faithful, before Holy Mass or Holy Communion respectively, must abstain for three hours from solid foods and alcoholic liquids, for one hour from non-alcoholic liquids. Water does not break the fast.
3. From now on, the fast must be observed for the period of time indicated in Number

Two, even by those who celebrate or receive Holy Communion at midnight or in the first hours of the day.

4. The infirm, even if not bedridden, may take non-alcoholic liquids and that which is really and properly medicine, either in liquid or solid form, before Mass or Holy Communion without any time limit.

We strongly exhort priests and faithful who are able to do so to observe the old and venerable form of the Eucharistic fast before Mass and Holy Communion. All those who will make use of these concessions must compensate for the good received by becoming shining examples of a Christian life and principally with works of penance and charity.

#### Appendix C: the ‘infirm’ in the discipline of *Sacrum Communione*m

*Sacrum Communione*m Section 4, on the ‘infirm’, requires some interpretation in light of Canon law. While this may seem complicated, it does illustrate Pope Pius XII’s great concern not to impose any unreasonable burdens on the Faithful.<sup>36</sup>

- i. The ‘infirm’ are those for whom the fast imposes a ‘moderately grave’ inconvenience. This may be because of illness, age, a long journey, a temporary or chronic condition, or for any other reason. It includes those who are in danger of becoming ill, are about to undergo an operation, etc., as well as those infirm before Communion, since in both cases the fast imposes a burden on the individual. Those for whom the fast does not impose a grave inconvenience are not ‘infirm’ for the purposes of the legislation (a person with a broken arm, for example).
- ii. ‘Non-alcoholic liquids’ includes those with nutritional value, such as soups. By contrast, the non-infirm under Section 2 are allowed only ‘drinks’ (taken ‘per modum potus’), for the first two hours of the fast. Solid food breaks the fast even for the infirm.
- iii. Medicine, even when alcohol is an ingredient (it is dissolved in alcohol, etc.) does not break the fast. Alcoholic beverages, even if taken for medicinal purposes on a physician’s orders, do break the fast.

---

<sup>36</sup> For a full treatment, see Sammut *op. cit.* pp116-7, and pp83-88.