

# What Spiritual Communion Is and Why We Need It Now

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*“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.” Saint Teresa of Avila*

In the history and traditions of the Church, the term “spiritual communion” refers to the grace of experiencing communion with Jesus Christ when gathering together and sharing in the celebration of the Eucharist is not possible. Prayer takes the form of thanksgiving for communion with Him, particularly when one would normally share in Christ’s presence at the Eucharist with the gathered community.

For some of us this may be an entirely new idea. However, in the long history of the Church, spiritual communion was actually the common practice. One hundred years ago, it was common for very few people to receive communion at any given mass. The faithful went to mass and prayed. More often than not the priest alone received communion. Pope Pius X (1903-1914) encouraged the faithful to receive communion but this admonition was not widely adopted. The requirement to receive communion at least once a year generally meant receiving communion only at Easter. Today weekly communion has become normative. So the current “stay at home” orders in combating the Corona-19 pandemic have turned our manner of worship upside down.

Since we cannot gather together physically, it is helpful to know that “spiritual communion” is not some esoteric practice. It has been advocated and practiced by many saints and was commended as beneficial at the Council of Trent. Pope Francis has encouraged the practice today.

The key to the experience of “spiritual communion” is the desire to experience the real presence of Christ when receiving the body and blood of Christ at Mass is not possible.

There is no prescribed method to experience “spiritual communion.” Many saints have written devotional prayers regarding the experience. The following prayer is widely used by those desiring “spiritual communion” when being physically present at mass is impossible:

*“My Jesus, I believe that you are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. I love you above all things, and long for you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though you have already come, I embrace you and unite myself entirely to you; never permit*

*me to be separated from you. Amen.”* (St. Alphonsus de Liguori, 1696-1787)

When Bishop Peter says Mass for us and we watch him from home, the door is open to experience Christ’s real presence within each of us. Furthermore our “spiritual communion” awakens our faith, hope, and love to a future time, God alone knows, when we, as the body of Christ, will be physically together again to share Mass with one another. In the meantime, let us feed on Christ in our hearts with thanksgiving and be faithful in prayer.