

Jesus Christ gave his body and blood to the disciples at the Last Supper, and he continually gives himself to us with every mass. As Catholics, we believe that Jesus is truly present in this eucharist, and that the single most important thing we do is to gather for Sunday mass and share communion together. Our communion is a communion with Christ. It also signifies our communion with one another.

The eucharist is the holiest food and drink we share. When you are at table with family and friends, very special things can happen. The right evening, the right menu, the right conversation, the right mood will create an extraordinary bond of love at the table. But the eucharist accomplishes even more. It draws us into communion with Jesus himself.

The Catholic Church restricts who comes to communion, and this has met with criticism from some members and nonmembers alike. We do not invite to the table, for example, people from other churches, people married outside the Catholic Church, or those in serious sin like people who have procured or helped procure an abortion and have not yet been forgiven. Many people feel our rules are too strict. Other churches with a more open communion policy say something like, "It's not our table. Jesus invites people to this meal." We have stressed that the mass signifies our communion with Christ and also our communion with one another as a church. We balance the sacredness of this meal with the condition of those who share it. In one way, we are all unworthy of communion. We say that together at every mass before we step forward to receive.

In recent months, a few American bishops have made news saying that politicians who support legislation for abortion and even people who vote for them should refrain from communion. Other bishops have disagreed. Most bishops, here and abroad, are remaining silent, probably figuring the laws of the church already guide people enough on who receives communion. After all, the primary mission of the church is evangelization, inviting people to the table. Catholic voters face a dilemma each election year. There is no true pro-life candidate. Opposition to abortion is a cornerstone of the pro-life movement, but the movement also includes opposition to the death penalty, to an unprovoked invasion of another country, taxes that burden the poor, and tariffs that increase world hunger. It's hard to find a completely pro-life candidate and a completely pro-life voter. It is important to consider carefully what we believe and how we vote. I will continue to offer communion to all those who present themselves in the line. If there is a question about someone receiving communion, I think that is best handled after mass, not during mass.

St. Paul cautions that we should not approach the table of the Lord unworthily, but he also reminds us today that Jesus gave us his body and blood at the Last Supper and urged us to do this in remembrance of him. "As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup," Paul says, "you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes." That is the aim of our communion.