

## WHAT'S ALL THIS ABOUT 'EASTER DUTY'?

Back in the 'good old days' of the Church, Catholics were required to receive Holy Communion (after Confession, of course, so they'd more likely be in a state of grace) during the Easter season. You might guess that the Easter season would consist of the days between Easter and Pentecost, this liturgical season's formal end. But you would be wrong.

The Church granted an *indult* (permission) to the United States to expand its understanding of "Easter season" to include Lent and the week following Pentecost–Trinity Sunday. But why oblige in this way at all? Is it really so necessary?

Once upon a time, yes, it was. Sad to say, there was a far too large period of the history of the Church when folks (either because of a sense of personal sinfulness or unworthiness, or else because of indifference) would rarely receive Holy Communion at all. Practices like the elevation of the Host and Chalice, or Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, grew in these times precisely because people thought they were 'worthy' only to gaze at the Eucharist and not receive it. St. Ignatius Loyola ran afoul of the Inquisition in part because he advocated lay people's reception of the Eucharist more than once a month!

The precept of 'Easter duty' is still on the books (literally: at canon 920, §2 of the *Code of Canon Law*), but these days we need not worry. Our concern might actually need to be focused in the opposite direction.

Whatever else 'worthiness' might mean, and not wanting to get into any polemics about 'grace v. earning one's salvation,' surely a minimum standard we can agree on is taking care to be presentable when coming to the table of our Lord. This means much beyond dressing in a manner that shows respect both for the Body of Christ sacramentally and the Body of Christ gathered in the church– it also means proper examination of one's conscience, proper interior disposition of sorrow for sin, love of Jesus Christ, and desire for union with Him. It means ongoing commitment to discipleship. Without all of this, we are simply going through the motions.

In the older (1917) *Code of Canon Law*, there was an addendum to the Easter duty that reminded people a 'sacrilegious' reception of the Sacrament did not satisfy the requirement. That should hardly have had to have been added. But for us, perhaps we might understand the term 'sacrilegious' as 'unthinking,' 'half-hearted,' or 'mechanical.' In such a case, have we (you, and I) yet met our obligation for the Easter duty? I hope so! But if not, we have this coming Sunday still to make amends, focus on our Lord, and call Him into our hearts.