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on
Early and Daily
Communion

“Father Carson Explains”

By Rev. Edward F. Garesché, S. J.

SEVENTH EDITION
35,000

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Imprimi potest

ALEXANDER J. BURROWES, S. J.,
Provincial of the Missouri Province

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✠ JOANNES CARDINALIS FARLEY,
Archiepiscopus Neo-Ebor

New York, February 18, 1913.

Father Carson Explains

A DIALOGUE ON EARLY AND DAILY COMMUNION
FOR ALL.

Mrs. Mary went up the steps of the parochial residence with an air of excited determination, and rang the door bell with energy. She had a very positive way with her when anything was on her mind.

“Father Carson, please,” said she to the smiling housekeeper. “Tell him I wish to talk with him on something urgent—and important.”

Father Carson smiled too when he received the message.

“I think I can guess what that ‘something’ is,” said he; “you’d better have the pile of books on my study-table convenient, to bring me, when I ring. I’m afraid Mrs. Mary is going to examine me in theology, ethics and canon law this afternoon.” And he went downstairs to the parlor.

“Well, Father Carson!” cried Mrs. Mary, “what is this that Bobby says you told him? That poor little mite to make his First Communion in May?”

“And why not, to be sure?” answered Father Carson, with provoking good humor. “Isn’t he turned seven whole years of age? Didn’t you listen when I read the Pope’s Decree at Mass the other Sunday?”

“Well!” said Mrs. Mary, with a peculiar emphasis, settling herself more firmly in her chair. “Just go ahead. I suppose you’re going to try to convert me to these new ideas.



But it will be a very cold day in June when you can satisfy me that Bobby ought to be making his First Communion now."

"My dear Mrs. Mary," answered Father Carson, with a pleasant twinkle in his eye, "I can sum up all the arguments I need to use with you in one short, true sentence. Bobby should make his First Communion now, because unfortunately, he has not made it sooner,—and he should make it in May, so that he can go every day during Our Lady's month, and as often as he can forever afterward. Now, what do you think of that?"

"Think!" gasped Mrs. Mary, "I think it perfectly awful—the very idea!"

"Now I'm going to ask you, Mrs. Mary," said Father Carson, looking a bit more serious, "to tell me your doubts, your difficulties, your fears and questions—all the reasons you have against Bobby's making his First Communion now, and going every day of his life that he can. Because I know," and here the smile came back again, "that if you are once converted to orthodox views on this so very important matter of Children's Communions, you will become the apostle of your neighborhood, and save your pastor a great deal of explaining."

"Oh, I suppose so!" said Mrs. Mary, with a toss of her head. "Well, to begin with, he's much too young."

"Too young for what?" answered Father Carson, amiably.

"Too young to understand what he is doing, in the first place," answered Mrs. Mary.

“Now please attend to what I am going to say, Mrs. Mary. You think Bobby too young because he can’t understand. But perhaps you don’t realize, that in order to receive the benefit of the Blessed Sacrament, one doesn’t need to understand. Why, in some places in the very earliest days of the Church—now mark this well—little babies, just after Baptism, were taken up to the altar and given a sip of the Precious Blood. Do you suppose the Fathers, who approved of that custom of giving Communion to babies in arms, did not know their Christian Doctrine as well as ourselves? And what can a babe in arms understand of Holy Communion? Yet I assure you, that if only those little babes were baptized, and swallowed one drop of that Precious Blood, they received an increase of sanctifying grace in their souls, as surely as did the greatest saint who ever went to Communion.”

“Well, I declare!” cried Mrs. Mary. “Babies in arms? I never heard of such a thing! And do you say that they truly received the good of the Sacrament?”

“They undoubtedly did!” answered Father Carson, with emphasis. “Why shouldn’t they, pray? Is there anyone in the world more innocent than a little child? And all that one needs to receive a fruitful Holy Communion, is to be baptized and in the state of grace, and to swallow the Sacred Species of the Sacrament.”

“Even if one doesn’t know what he is doing?” gasped Mrs. Mary.

“Even if one doesn’t know what he is doing!” affirmed Father Carson. “The one only thing absolutely necessary is—the state of grace. True, if one has the use of reason, there must be some intention to receive the Sacrament—but supposing this, the one thing necessary is—the state of grace.”

“But how can that be?” cried Mrs. Mary. “I always thought that a good preparation was so necessary, to receive Holy Communion fruitfully.”

“All we grown-ups,” answered Father Carson, “owe it to our Eucharistic Lord, to make ready for Him with all the reverence and love we can, when He visits us in the Blessed Eucharist. And this preparation surely opens a wider door to the grace of the Sacrament. The better we prepare, the more grace we receive. But so long as we are in the state of grace, and have a good intention, the door is open wide enough for grace to enter in. Our Lord can come fruitfully into our souls. The reason of this wonderful truth, which I see puzzles you very much, is contained in these three words, which theologians use to describe the action of the Blessed Sacrament: It has an efficacy ‘*Ex opere operato.*’”

“Latin! But what does it mean?” answered Mrs. Mary.

“It means, ‘*On account of the deed which is done,*’” answered Father Carson, “and if you wish to understand what is, to my mind, the very basic reason for early and frequent Communion, you must listen to a thorough explana-

tion of the meaning of those three words, '*ex opere operato.*'"

"Please go on," said Mrs. Mary, "I'll do my very best to understand."

"Every Sacrament," began Father Carson, "is really an act, and a prayer of Our Blessed Lord. True, it is the priest or other minister who goes through the actions, and who speaks the words, but he does so in the name and in the person of Christ. And the Heavenly Father, seeing those actions, hearing those words which Christ has bidden His ministers to do and speak in His Name, is moved by the merits of His Divine Son, to pour down on the recipient that grace, actual and sanctifying, which Christ meant that they should receive when He instituted the Sacrament. Is that clear to your mind?"

"You mean," said Mrs. Mary, "that God gives us grace, because the Sacrament is, in His eyes, not only an act of the priest, but even more an act of His Divine Son. I think I can follow that."

"Very good!" went on Father Carson. "This, then, is what is meant by '*opus operatum,*' the 'deed which is done' in Christ's Person, and in His Name; and so long as those words and actions are duly performed by the authorized representative of Christ, the Sacrament is complete, ready to pour grace into the soul of the recipient, by reason of the very '*deed which has been done.*' Remember it is Christ who has done the deed. It is His merit which moves the Heavenly Father to pour down grace on the

recipient. All that is absolutely required now on the part of the receiver of the Sacrament is this—that he put no positive impediment in the way. Now apply all this to the Blessed Eucharist. This Holy Sacrament is made ready at the Consecration of the Mass, when bread and wine are changed into Christ's Body and Blood. But it is applied to the receiver, when he performs the act of swallowing the Sacrament. He may be distracted at the moment. He may be a tiny babe, which has just been baptized. But if he swallows the Sacramental Body of Christ, '*opus est operatum:—the deed is done!*' Jesus has fed him with His Sacred Body, as He fed His Apostles at the Last Supper. God has seen the Holy Sign complete, and by virtue of *the deed that has been done* ('*ex opere operato,*' you remember) He unflinchingly pours down His grace into that soul, unless some obstacle interfere. Now what are the obstacles that can interfere in the case of Holy Communion? Only the lack of those two conditions which Christ Himself laid down, and which His Church teaches us are alone required for a fruitful reception of this Sacrament. These two conditions are, first, the state of grace, gained by Baptism, or by Penance after a mortal fall; and second, in adults, the intention to receive the Sacrament. Now, is all this clear?"

"It sounds very strange," said Mrs. Mary, "why, from what you say, nothing more is required for a fruitful Communion than for a fruitful Baptism."

“Only the state of grace,” said Father Carson, smiling. “Anyone who can be baptized, can receive the Holy Eucharist fruitfully straightway afterward, provided only he can swallow the Blessed Sacrament. But from motives of reverence, not everyone who may be baptized is allowed to receive the Holy Eucharist. The two Sacraments are not equally necessary, you see.”

“Well, isn’t it an irreverence to the Blessed Sacrament,” said Mrs. Mary, “to give Communion to little tots who can scarcely say their prayers? How can they realize what they are doing?”

“Ah, my dear Mrs. Mary,” said Father Carson, “if it comes to that, do we realize much more ourselves what we are doing, when we receive the Bread of Life? We believe that Jesus Himself is present—truly and really present there in the adorable Sacrament as He is in the court of heaven—but how far do we realize the great Gift of God? Does it fill our heart and mind for hours and hours beforehand? Do we spend days and nights in an ecstasy of gratitude afterward, unable to do anything else than marvel at the goodness and mercy of God? Yet these things are what one would expect from us, if we realized what it means to receive the God of Heaven Himself in the Blessed Sacrament.”

“Why,” said Mrs. Mary, “I suppose not. I don’t, I’m sorry to say. Only the great saints realized it so.”

“Then let us not keep the little ones from

this mighty Sacrament, which works such sure and splendid holiness in their souls, because they forsooth do not altogether realize what they are doing! If that were requisite for good Communions, good Communions would be rare, indeed, I fear."

"But if all this is true, then why are we always urged to make such a careful preparation before Holy Communion," inquired Mrs. Mary, "if one can receive fruitfully with so little preparing?"

"To receive Communion fruitfully is one thing," said Father Carson. "To do our full duty by our loving Lord requires something more. Surely, the best we can do is not too good for such a visitor. We should never think of sitting down to any earthly banquet with any earthly guest, until we had made ourselves neat and clean, and seen to it that everything was ready to entertain him. How much more carefully we should prepare when we are making ready to entertain the Lord of Heaven and earth! Then, as I was saying before, another weighty reason for careful preparation, is that the better one is prepared, the more grace he receives from the Sacrament. The floods of grace which Holy Communion brings to the portals of our soul are like a mighty river, bountiful enough to save a world of souls. But not all that flood of graces can enter into every heart. If the flood-gates of our soul have been thrown wide by a careful preparation, great tides of grace pour in upon us. But if they have merely been set a bit ajar by a good intention and the state of grace, then the fruit

of the Sacrament will be less bountiful and overflowing. The better we prepare, the greater our grace and merits are."

"Then the longer the preparation the better!" exclaimed Mrs. Mary.

"As good and as fervent a preparation as we can make under the circumstances—we owe that to God and to our own souls," said Father Carson. "But suppose that we find ourselves unable to spend a very long time in preparation? Holy Communion, remember, is the Food of our soul. Now, who would refrain from eating when in sore need of food, merely because he had not time to prepare as carefully as he would desire? Our Lord bids us consider the Blessed Sacrament as our food. One can scarcely spend as much time in immediate preparation for taking one's daily bread, as one might for a ceremonious banquet which one attends only once or twice a year."

"But isn't all that a dangerous doctrine?" exclaimed Mrs. Mary. "People are careless enough as it is. If they hear that a long preparation isn't absolutely required, they will do still less to make ready to receive Our Lord."

"Of course, it is a dangerous doctrine," answered Father Carson, "for those tepid folk who are always on the lookout for ways of doing as little as they possibly can for God. Such people are always in danger of abusing God's goodness, and they should, indeed, be urged to make a more and more careful preparation. But it is not these tepid and careless ones who wish to go often and daily to Holy Communion and are deterred by vain scruples and

groundless fears. It is the good and fervent men and women and the innocent children who are kept away from the altar by false and exaggerated notions of what is required by way of preparation. To them one must say with the Pope: 'What is absolutely necessary is, the state of grace and a good intention.' After that, the more careful one's preparation is, the better. Let us do as much as ever we can for Our Lord. But if we can do only a little, we need not, therefore, stay away from His Heavenly Repast."

"Well, somehow," said Mrs. Mary, "I still see something unbecoming in letting a little mite receive the Blessed Sacrament."

"Mrs. Mary," said Father Carson, "I asked you for reasons and you are giving me prejudices. The one thing unbecoming in God's sight is sin. Sin alone can make a soul ugly and disgusting to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. And where is He more sure of finding that snowy sinlessness, which His Sacred Heart so deeply delights in and longs for, than in the fresh, stainless heart of a simple, innocent child? And do you think, Mrs. Mary, that we are any of us much more than children in Jesus' sight? Ah, but we are naughty children, most of us, who have grown rebellious and wayward, and grieved our heavenly Brother's Heart. We are spoiled children, who give Him anxiety and pain. But these tender little ones are as pure and spotless now as when He gathered them to His loving arms in the Sacrament of Baptism. How He must yearn to keep them so, all their lives! How

He must long with all His mighty Heart to come to them every day in the all-powerful Sacrament of Love, to quite preoccupy them, body and soul, and keep them all His own! Do you never look at Bobby's bright and innocent little face, Mrs. Mary, and wish that he might always be as pure, as good and white of soul, as he is now, when he is guileless and young?"

Mrs. Mary wiped away a furtive tear.

"Of course I do! What mother doesn't?" said she. "Dear little fellow! I just hate to think of his ever growing up."

"Who can keep him pure and innocent so surely," said Father Carson, "as Jesus Himself, if He feeds him every morning with His own Flesh and Blood? Would it not be best, Mrs. Mary, to let Our Lord take early and daily possession of these pure little hearts before the world, and the flesh and the devil steal in and work sad ruin of their innocence?"

Part Two

"Well, but Father," said Mrs. Mary, "Mrs. Manley's boys go to Communion very often since the Decree. They live in Father Healy's parish. And you should see what wild little scamps they are. Why doesn't frequent Communion have more effect on them?"

"To begin with," answered Father Carson, "your remark is based on a false supposition. Holy Communion is not a reward of virtue, to be given only to exemplary souls, nor is it a cure-all, nor a violent drug, which changes everything at once. It is a divine Food, a

gentle and heavenly Medicine, healing, strengthening, staying up our minds and our hearts with actual graces, and increasing the holiness of our souls. Now, we eat bodily food, even when we are ill, even when we have little appetite, because we need strength and support in our sickness, and we take bodily medicine to make us well, even more than to keep us so. If the food and the medicine do not have their effect just at once, we say: 'Patience! I can't expect to get well all of a sudden!' Now, why shouldn't we think just as sensibly and practically with regard to this heavenly Food and Medicine of our souls?"

"And so—to come back to the Manley boys—even if they weren't very good children, as they are, even if they were wild and intractable and disobedient and lied a bit, and didn't say their prayers, even then, I say (now don't be shocked—this is good Theology) they ought to go often (with due instruction, of course, and preparation) and receive the Food and Medicine which can best build up and cure their spiritual weaknesses. Isn't that sensible now?"

Mrs. Mary was lost in her reflections. These were new thoughts, indeed!

"Then, again," went on Father Carson, after pausing a little, "I wonder what your idea of a really good boy is? Some grown-ups have the queerest notion of what a boy should be. Do you want him to be a pale, demure little creature, who goes about with his hands always folded, and his eyes turned up to the ceiling?"

“Oh, no! of course not!” said Mrs. Mary emphatically. “I like boys to be boys, not little plaster statues, of course. But the idea of such thoughtless, lively little fellows going up to the Holy Table every morning and receiving that tremendous Sacrament, then running off and laughing and playing all day long—some how it makes me creep.”

“That is because you are full of old, ingrained, unreasonable prejudices, Mrs. Mary, as I told you before,” said Father Carson. “What do you think those tiny babies did who received the Holy Communion just after they were baptized, through all those centuries during which, as I told you, infant Communion existed in the Church? Do you suppose that those little innocents acted otherwise than our modern little babies do? Of course not. They merely swallowed the Blessed Sacrament, and then spent all the rest of the day laughing or crying or eating or sleeping or reaching after the moon. Yet they truly received the Sacrament, and so were made as surely holier. They were truly fed with the Heavenly Food, and they took it as well as babies can.”

“But if it was right to give Communion to babies then, and made them holier,” said Mrs. Mary, “why doesn’t the Church do it still?”

“For several reasons, Mrs. Mary,” answered Father Carson. “After the twelfth century, the practice gradually died away. One reason was, the danger and inconvenience of giving Holy Communion as the babes received It, under the form of wine. Another was, that men came to think more upon the awful dignity of

the Sacrament, and so grew to look upon it as unbecoming that anyone should receive who could not understand at all what he was about. But notice, please, there is no question of a change of belief, but only of practice or custom. We believe, now as then, that anyone who is baptized and in the state of grace and who swallows the Blessed Eucharist, receives the fruits of the Sacrament, even though he be a little child. If the Holy Father chose to order it so, we might begin to give Communion again tomorrow, even to babes in arms!"

"Oh, how strange that sounds every time that you say it," said Mrs. Mary. "Communion to little babes in arms!"

"They were baptized, and they were in the state of grace," said Father Carson. "And I tell you again, to impress it on your mind, that is all that Christ demands for a fruitful reception of the Holy Eucharist. And He is very content, if every one prepares according as he can. Boys like boys, women like women, men like men—each one is to prepare and to make thanksgiving in his own character, not in any one else's. So, if you see the Manley boys romping and playing ten minutes after Communion, don't say to yourself: 'Would that be becoming in me so soon after Communion?'—but rather ask: 'Is that becoming in boys?'—for, please remember, God does not want them to be good angels nor even good men as yet, but good, honest, wholesome boys—and it is right for a boy to romp and play. And ten minutes' thanksgiving means as much to a

boy as half an hour or more would mean to you!"

"Well, they are very good boys, with all their noise and fun," said Mrs. Mary, "but how inconvenient Mrs. Manley must find it, to have them running off to church every morning before breakfast to go to Communion!"

"I happen to know Mrs. Manley quite well," replied Father Carson, "and I can assure you she has far less trouble now with her boys of a morning than she used to before they began to go so often to Communion. Like a sensible woman, she changed the daily order a bit, to make it as easy as possible for them to go as often as they like. And don't you know, Mrs. Mary, what one does every day at a certain hour grows far more easy and usual than it one does it only now and then? It is truly a fact, that persons who go to Mass and Communion every day of their lives, find it easier far than those who go every week. As for those who go every month, or every year, they find it a burden, indeed. Habit, you see, makes everything light."

"That sounds all very well," said Mrs. Mary, "but how does she get all those boys up on time every morning? I have trouble enough getting Bobby awake for his breakfast and school!"

"They live five blocks from church," said Father Carson, "that takes five minutes to walk. Mass is at half-past seven, and their school begins at nine. They rise at seven—and let me tell you they rise—they get up themselves, like little men, because they have an object before them. If they can't get up in time,

she tells them they are surely not very anxious to receive our Blessed Lord—and they do get up in time! By twenty minutes past seven they are off. Mass is over at eight. They are home by a quarter past eight, and the rest is plain sailing. You see how it can be done?”

“O-o-oh! But they didn’t spend *any* time in thanksgiving,” said Mrs. Mary. “Why, from what you say, they must run away right after Mass.”

“They do the best they can,” said Father Carson. “That is all Our Lord requires. Which is better, when one is in a hurry, and hungry, too, to eat rapidly, or not eat at all? And Holy Communion is meant to be—so our Holy Father, the Pope, and the Councils and the Fathers all assure us—the frequent and daily food of our souls. Ah, if the children can, let them stay by all means and make a longer thanksgiving. If they can’t—better far Communion without a long thanksgiving than no Communion at all.”

“But isn’t it very inconvenient for those boys to go to confession so often?” said Mrs. Mary. “One has to wait so long at times, particularly on Saturday nights! Besides, they must annoy the parish priest dreadfully.”

“The answer to that is very simple,” said Father Carson. “They don’t go to confession so often. Why need they, unless they should have committed some greivous sin? Confession once every one or two weeks is quite as much as need be required from good children who go to Communion every day or frequently during the week. Indeed, our Holy Father, who is so

desirous that the little ones should go daily to Communion, has been careful to point out that frequent confession is not required."

"But I always thought it desirable to go to confession every time one went to Communion," said Mrs. Mary with a puzzled air.

"So it is, if one goes only once in a rather long while. And indeed confession is always a grace and a blessing. But when one goes to Communion every day, or very often a week, then other considerations may prevent him from going to confession so often. One must consider the convenience of the pastor, and of those other penitents, who may need to go to confession far more than the daily communicants do! Confession, you see, becomes a necessity before Holy Communion, only when one is quite sure that he or she has committed a mortal sin since the last confession. But of course, the practical rule to follow is—to ask one's confessor how often he thinks one should come to confession, and then to follow the advice that he gives."

"But at least," said Mrs. Mary, "isn't it necessary to go to confession every time, to gain the plenary indulgences? It always says, 'Confession and Communion' when it tells how to gain a plenary indulgence. And one likes to gain all the indulgences one can."

"Our Holy Father, the Pope, thought of all that long ago," said Father Carson, smiling, "and arranged it nicely for daily communicants. On February 14th, 1906—two months after his first Decree on Daily Communion—he issued another Decree about the necessity

of confession for gaining indulgences. In this latter he says that he wishes to grant a special favor in this regard to daily communicants. Pope Clement XIII., had long ago, in 1763, made confession once a week sufficient, for gaining all the indulgences (except the Jubilee) which fell within the week, to all who were not conscious of having committed any mortal sin since their last confession. And now our present Holy Father, Pius X., declares in favor of daily communicants that they may avail themselves of this indult of Clement XIII., without the weekly *confession*, which in other circumstances is still of obligation for rightly gaining the indulgences which occur during the week. This privilege, his Holiness declares, will hold good in future times; and is granted to all the faithful who, being in the state of grace, and having a right and devout intention, are accustomed daily to receive the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, even if they once or twice in the week omit their daily Communion. So you see that daily communicants may gain plenary indulgences without even weekly confession being required of them."

Mrs. Mary was silent.

"And here is another matter for you to consider, Mrs. Mary," went on Father Carson relentlessly. "Do you realize how very far the Manley boys are getting ahead of Bobby in that inward sanctity which Holy Communion brings? Every Holy Communion, mind, worthily received, carries with it into the soul, besides all manner of actual graces, an unimaginable increase in sanctifying grace. And

sanctifying grace is the pure gold of the Spirit with which we are to purchase our glory in heaven. Perhaps—mind I say *perhaps*, because God has not chosen to tell us—perhaps all the merits of all a lifetime may not gain us as great an increase of this grace as we get, through the merits of Jesus, in one Holy Communion. And there they are, those Manley boys, going day after day, month after month, and doubling and trebling the store of grace in their souls, while poor little Bobby—because his good mother won't listen to our Holy Father the Pope—has never made his First Communion at all, and so has to be satisfied with only that amount of the gold of sanctifying grace which his own poor little actions can bring him."

"Oh, stop!—please do! You make me feel dreadfully jealous and envious and all," cried Mrs. Mary. "There! I give up! Bobby shall make his First Communion as soon as ever he can, and shall go every day of his life, if his mother can make him!"

"Now not too fast either," said Father Carson, with a ghost of his former smile. "Bobby mustn't be ordered, nor driven to go. But if you make him feel, in the way that mothers know, how good it is for him to go often, and how it will please our dear Lord and you, he will take to it gladly enough. Do you think a child cannot be made to understand what a great grace Holy Communion is? Only try it, and see. But use clear and true and easily understood arguments, which will appeal to his mind, and if he does not wish to go, on this

morning or that, and has some good reason, then leave him quite free. No bullying, mind!"

"And do you think," said Mrs. Mary, "that I might sometimes—very often—go with him, too? Because I need grace myself, too, don't you think, Father Carson? And someone told me, you know, that Mrs. Manley goes with her boys all the time!"

Father Carson threw up his hands in despair. "Oh, to ask such a question!" said he, "after all my reading and explaining in the Church, about the Decrees of the Pope on Daily Communion! Here, Mrs. Mary," and he rang the bell loud and long, "I had rather hoped, until now, that we would get through our little discussion nicely without any need of my books. But that last question of yours will bring an avalanche of print on your devoted head! Put them on the table, please!" said he to the housekeeper; "that's right, the little one on top. And you!" said he to Mrs. Mary, "just fold your hands and listen!"

"To begin with, this little pamphlet I have in my hand is the famous Decree of our present Pontiff, Pius X., on the Daily Receiving of Holy Communion. It is to me one of the most splendid Acts of our Holy Father's glorious Pontificate; and if everyone heeded his earnest and fervent words, how speedily they would change the face of the earth! Mind, then, these are the words of Christ's own Vicar on earth, and every Catholic owes them assent and obedience. To argue against what is herein contained, to refuse obedience, even to be slow

in obeying, would be to show oneself a very poor sort of Catholic indeed."

"You needn't begin with a sermon, my dear Father Carson," said Mrs. Mary. "If the Holy Father tells us to go to Holy Communion often, that is just what I want to hear. But don't *READ* it to me. Tell me the substance of it, and explain it, please, as you go."

"Well, I'll give you the gist of it, then," said Father Carson, opening the pamphlet. "First of all, the Decree recalls what was ordered by the great Council of Trent, as long ago as the year 1562. Listen to the words of this Council, which spoke with all the authority of the Church to all the Faithful. 'The Holy Synod would desire that at every Mass the Faithful who are present should communicate not only spiritually, by way of internal affection, but sacramentally, by the actual reception of the Eucharist.' Mark that, Mrs. Mary!—at every Mass, the Faithful who are present are desired to go to Communion. And the Pope's late Decree goes on to point out that these words of the Council express 'the wish of the Church that all Christians should be daily nourished by this *Heavenly Banquet*.' Therefore, ever since the 17th of September, 1562, daily Communion for all who can come to Mass has been the desire of the Church."

"Well, why in the world—" began Mrs. Mary.

"Just a minute, please. I know what you want to ask, and you shall have your answer," went on Father Carson. "But everything in its place. The Pope next declares that this wish of the Council of Trent is the very wish of our

Lord Himself when He instituted the Blessed Sacrament. For He chose bread, our daily food, for the matter of the Sacrament. He compared it with manna, the daily food of the Jews in the desert, and He bade us pray, in the Our Father, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' a phrase which the Fathers of the Church understand to mean Holy Communion. The early Christians, the Holy Father goes on to say in this Decree, understood Our Lord's wishes very well, and so they flocked to Daily Communion. And all through the years, some fervent souls kept up the practice of Daily Communion with 'great fruit of holiness and perfection.' And now, Mrs. Mary," and Father Carson paused and looked up from the book, "the Holy Father answers the question which I think you were about to ask me just a moment ago—'Why in the world did not the Faithful obey the wish of our Lord and His Church, and keep up this blessed custom of Daily Communion?' "

"Yes!" said Mrs. Mary, "that's just what I wanted to ask!"

"Well, now, I will read you the answer. But remember, please, this is not a matter of Faith or Morals. If it were, God never would have allowed so many good Catholics to go astray. The question merely was this: 'Should we receive only seldom, out of reverence for Our Lord's Body and Blood, or often, and even daily, because of the wish of Christ and of the Church and because of our own need or desire for the Holy Eucharist?' The Apostolic ages, as we have said, answered: 'Often and daily, because of God's wish, our own need and our

love!’ ‘But when in later times,’ the Decree goes on, ‘piety grew cold, and more especially under the influence of the plague of Jansenism, disputes began to arise concerning the dispositions with which it was proper to receive Communion frequently or daily, and writers vied with one another in imposing more and more stringent conditions as necessary to be fulfilled. The result of such disputes was that very few were considered worthy to communicate daily, and to derive from this most healing Sacrament Its more abundant fruits, the rest being content to partake of It once a year, or once a month, or at the utmost weekly. Nay, to such a pitch was rigorism carried, that whole classes of persons were excluded from a frequent approach to the Holy Table; for instance, those engaged in trade, or even those living in the state of matrimony.’ Meanwhile, as often happens, some foolish folk went to the opposite extreme and insisted that daily Communion was a divine commandment, so they gave It even on Good Friday!

“The Holy See, ever vigilant to correct abuses, issued a Decree on February 12, 1679, condemning these errors and abuses, but the poison of Jansenistic fear and reverence still worked in many of the Faithful, and men still held controversies without end as to the dispositions necessary for the lawful and laudable frequentation of the Sacraments. Not for its *fruitful* reception, mind! They were all agreed, as I explained to you before, that Baptism and the state of grace, and some previous desire

were enough for that—but for its *lawful* and *laudable* reception.

“And these discussions, despite the clear instructions of the Church, have waxed and waned for the last three centuries, even to the present day. ‘Accordingly,’ says the Decree once more, ‘certain distinguished men, themselves pastors of souls, have urgently besought His Holiness, Pope Pius X., to deign to settle, by his supreme authority, the question concerning the dispositions requisite for daily Communion; so that this usage, so salutary and so pleasing to God, might not only suffer no decrease among the Faithful, but might rather be promoted and everywhere propagated: a thing most desirable in these days, when religion and the Catholic Faith are attacked on all sides, and the true love of God and genuine piety are so lacking in many quarters. And His Holiness, *being most earnestly desirous*, out of his abundant solicitude and zeal, that the Faithful should be invited to partake of the Sacred Banquet *as often as possible, and even daily*, and should profit to the utmost by Its fruits, committed the aforesaid question to this Sacred Congregation, to be looked into and decided once for all.’

“Now this ‘Sacred Congregation of the Council’ (a committee of Cardinals, which was originally established by the Council of Trent, to deal with such matters as the present) held a plenary Session on December 16, 1905, and ‘submitted the whole matter to a very careful scrutiny; and after sedulously examining the reasons adduced on either side’—that is, for

and against daily Communion for all the Faithful—‘determined and declared as follows:’ Now follow, under nine divisions, the conclusions reached by the Congregation of the Council; these, remember, were all submitted to His Holiness (as is declared at the end) and he ‘ratified and confirmed the present Decree, and ordered it to be published, anything to the contrary notwithstanding.’ So these conclusions give us the mind of the Holy Father himself, instructing his faithful children all over the world, how they are to think and act regarding daily Communion. But is your brain growing weary?”

“Oh, no—go on, please!” said Mrs. Mary. “I want so much to hear just how the Pope has settled this discussion. Surely, one is safe in following the lead of the Pope!”

“Well, the Pope’s conclusion is as follows,” went on Father Carson. “First, he decides the controversy once for all, as to whether or not every one of the Faithful has a right to daily Communion. ‘Frequent and daily Communion, as a thing 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, can lawfully be hindered therefrom!’ Notice, only two conditions are required, the state of grace, and a right intention. But what is meant by a right intention here? The second paragraph tells us:

“‘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 for the purpose of pleasing God, or being more closely united with Him by charity, and of seeking this divine remedy for his weakness and defects!"

"The fourth paragraph tells us that, though it is far better that one should be free from all deliberate venial sins, still, it is sufficient to be free from mortal sins, and to purpose never to sin mortally again. And, 'if they have this sincere purpose, it is impossible but that daily communicants should gradually emancipate themselves from even venial sins, and from all affection thereto.'

"The fourth paragraph is a very important one, and would bear a great deal of development and meditation. Listen—'But whereas the Sacraments of the New Law, though they take effect *ex opere operato*, nevertheless produce a greater effect in proportion as the dispositions of the recipient are better; therefore, care is to be taken that Holy Communion be preceded by *serious preparation*, and followed by a *suitable thanksgiving* according to *each one's strength, circumstances and duties.*' The better our preparation, the more grace we receive from each Holy Communion. Yet, notice, one must distinguish between what is desirable and to be wished for, and what is absolutely required. No degree of preparation could be too great for such a Sacrament. But all that is required is, the serious preparation and due thanksgiving which each one's strength, circumstances and duties will allow.

If they allow one to spend only a very brief time, a short time will do. If they allow more time, more time should be given. But each one may suit his daily preparation and thanksgiving to the circumstances of his daily life. Isn't that reasonable and kind?"

"Very reasonable and very kind!" said Mrs. Mary. "What a wise and gracious document this Decree seems to be! Is that all?"

"No. A fifth paragraph says: 'That the practice of frequent and daily Communion may be carried out with greater prudence and more abundant merit, the confessor's advice should be asked. Confessors, however, are to be careful not to dissuade anyone from frequent and daily Communion, provided that he is in the state of grace and approaches with a right intention.' Then a sixth paragraph tells the fruits of Daily Communion, and bids priests encourage it: 'But since it is plain that, by the frequent or daily reception of the Holy Eucharist, union with Christ is fostered, the spiritual life more abundantly sustained, the soul more richly endowed with virtues, and an even surer pledge of everlasting happiness bestowed on the recipient, therefore parish priests, confessors and preachers, in accordance with the approved teaching of the Roman Catechism (Part ii, cap. 4, n. 63), are frequently, and with great zeal, to exhort the Faithful to this devout and salutary practice.' The seventh and eighth paragraphs refer to Religious Orders and Institutes; and the last, the ninth, declares: 'Finally, after the publication of this Decree, all ecclesiastical writers are to

cease from contentious controversies concerning the dispositions requisite for frequent and daily Communion.'

"So you see, Mrs. Mary," finished Father Carson, as he lifted his head, and put the book aside, "Our Lord, and the Church and the Holy Father are all agreed that it would be a glorious and blessed thing if every one of the Faithful would receive Holy Communion every day of their lives that It is given in the Church."

"Oh, goody!" said Mrs. Mary, clapping her hands, "I feel as happy as I did when I was a little girl, and they told me I might make my First Communion! But how far does that Decree oblige all Catholics?"

"It does not oblige them to go to Communion any oftener than they were bound to go before, once a year," answered Father Carson. "But it does oblige them all to own that every one of the Faithful who is in the state of grace and has a right intention, has a right to daily Communion; and that a right intention here, means merely a wish to please God, or to be more closely united with Him by charity, or to seek this divine Remedy for our weaknesses and defects. It puts it beyond dispute, besides, that Our Lord, and the Church, and our Holy Father the Pope, earnestly desire every Catholic in the world to use this glorious right of daily Communion as soon and as often as he or she possibly can.

"And now," finished Father Carson, taking up another pamphlet from the heap, "it is too bad I must run off to hear Confessions. I should have liked so much to read and explain

to you this other momentous Decree of our Holy Father on early First Communion. But we will have that some other time and, besides, I gave you the gist of it when we were speaking of Bobby."

- "Well, but tell me briefly the principal points," said Mrs. Mary, "so I'll know what to look for."

"First," said Father Carson, "the age required for Confession and Communion is the same, when the child begins to reason, that is, the seventh year, more or less. Second, a perfect knowledge of the Catechism is not necessary before First Communion. But it must at least be learned gradually afterward. Third, the knowledge required is 'that they understand according to their capacity those mysteries of Faith which are necessary as a means of salvation, that they be able to distinguish the Eucharist from common and material bread, and also approach the Sacred Table with the devotion becoming their age.' Fourth, the obligation of annual Communion, *which begins to bind children when they have reached the age of reason*, falls back principally on their *parents*, confessors, teachers and pastors. The father or the confessor is to admit the child to First Holy Communion. Then the Decree goes on to direct pastors to have, once or several times a year, a General Communion, and it urges those who have care of children to have them go often, and daily if possible, to Holy Communion.

"This is a very hasty survey, you see. The rest you must read for yourself."

Mrs. Mary took the two little pamphlets and stood up to go. "A thousand thanks, dear Father Carson!" said she; "what a revelation the things you have said have been for me!" Then her eyes fell on the heap of books still left on the table, and she caught her breath with a little gasp. "Father!" said she, "when we began to talk, you jested about my being an apostle of early and daily Communion. I tell you honestly I seriously mean to be one, the very best that ever I can! May I not borrow some more of your books and learn my lesson all the better?"

"As many as you can carry!" cried Father Carson cheerily. "And I'll send Joe along with the rest this evening. I'm proud of you, Mrs. Mary!"

"There goes the fire abroad at last," smiled Father Carson, as he stood at the door and watched the energetic figure, with its armful of books, hastening down the street. Then a sadder light came into his face and he sighed a little.

"Ah," said he to himself, "if they were all only as docile, and fervent, and brave as you, Mrs. Mary!"

Rev. Edward F. Garesché, S. J.

