



**"Whose sins you shall forgive,
they are forgiven them; and
whose sins you shall retain,
they are retained"**

JOHN 20:23

Why Catholics Must Attend Mass and Receive Communion in a State of Grace

1. The Eucharist as the Source and Summit of Christian Life

The Church teaches that the celebration of the Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life” (Lumen Gentium 11). By gathering at Mass we:

- **Enter into the Paschal Mystery** – we unite ourselves to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and His Resurrection (cf. John 6:57).
- **Become members of the Mystical Body of Christ** – the Eucharist makes us “one body” with Christ and with one another (USCCB Norms, § 1).
- **Receive spiritual nourishment** – the Body and Blood of Christ are the “spiritual food” that sustains our souls (USCCB Norms, § 1).

Because the Eucharist is the height of worship, the faithful are obliged to participate in Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation (Canon 1247 § 1). Attending Mass is thus a concrete expression of love for Christ and for the Church.

2. The Moral Requirement of a State of Grace

2.1 What “state of grace” means

Being in a state of grace means that the soul is free from **mortal sin** and has received the sacramental grace of Baptism and, when necessary, the **Sacrament of Reconciliation**. The Catechism states: *“Anyone who desires to receive Christ in Eucharistic communion must be in the state of grace. Anyone aware of having sinned mortally must not receive communion without having received absolution in the sacrament of penance.”*

2.2 Scriptural and Patristic Basis

St. Paul warns: “Let a man examine himself and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (1 Cor 11:28). The early Church, following this apostolic instruction, set conditions for reception (see Justin Martyr’s three requirements) that remain binding today.

2.3 The Church’s Explicit Teaching

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) reiterates that “a person who is conscious of grave sin is not to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord without prior sacramental confession”. The same principle appears in the **Ecclesia de Eucharistia** of Pope John Paul II, which emphasizes that “anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion”.

3. Reasons for the Requirement

| Reason | Explanation |
|--|---|
| Respect for the Blessed Sacrament | Receiving the Eucharist while in mortal sin constitutes sacrilege , a grave disrespect for the sacred Body and Blood of Christ. |
| Integrity of Communion | The Eucharist presupposes an existing communion with Christ and the Church; receiving it while deliberately breaking that communion is a “contradiction” and a “lie”. |
| Avoidance of Spiritual Harm | As Aquinas teaches, the Eucharist is a “medicine” that should be given only to those “quit of sin”; otherwise it can become a “poor” or “imperfect” reception that may even lead to spiritual injury. |
| Preparation for Grace | The sacrament of Penance restores sanctifying grace, making the recipient worthy to receive the fullness of the Eucharist’s grace (Ecclesia de Eucharistia § 36). |

| Reason | Explanation |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Communal Responsibility | Receiving unworthily harms not only the individual but also the community of believers , who share in the one Body of Christ (USCCB Norms) ¹ . |

4. Practical Guidance

1. **Examine Your Conscience** before Mass (1 Cor 11:28).
2. **Seek the Sacrament of Reconciliation** if you are aware of any mortal sin. If confession is unavailable, make an **act of perfect contrition** with the firm intention to confess as soon as possible (Canon 916).
3. **Participate in the Mass even when you cannot receive Communion**; you still obtain the grace of worship and can make a **spiritual communion** (a sincere desire to unite with Christ) while awaiting the sacrament of penance.
4. **Maintain a habit of frequent confession**, which keeps the soul in a regular state of grace and deepens the fruits of the Eucharist (USCCB Norms).

5. Summary

- **Mass is the essential gathering** where the Church celebrates the Paschal Mystery and distributes the Eucharist.
- **Reception of Communion demands a state of grace**: freedom from mortal sin, usually ensured through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- This requirement safeguards the **reverence due to the Blessed Sacrament**, preserves the **integrity of communion**, and protects the **spiritual health** of the faithful.
- By examining our consciences, receiving penance when needed, and participating fully in the liturgy, we fulfill Christ's command to "eat the flesh of the living God" in a worthy manner (John 6:55) and grow in communion with Him and the Church.