



# **Sacrament of First Holy Communion: PREPARATION NOTES FOR PARENTS & CANDIDATES**

**ST. PHILIP THE APOSTLE, MOUNTVIEW & BLAKESTOWN**

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Greetings from the parish office in Mountview & Blakestown.

Welcome to this time of 'unusual' preparation for the Sacrament of First Holy Communion. We hope that the notes below, which replaces the customary meeting with parents before the First Confession and Holy Communion, will give you and your child some understanding as well as make your child's Sacrament of First Holy Communion a meaningful faith experience. So, I thought I'd share with you some ideas and resources that help prepare our children's minds, hearts, and souls for the most blessed event of their childhood: their first Holy Communion.

It is always the primary responsibility of the parents to prepare the children and instruct them in matters of faith. Therefore, please prepare the children at home to understand the importance of the Sacraments they are going to receive in a few weeks' time. Please go through their religion book 'Grow in Love' and help them complete the pending works and lessons. Again, I am sure you will find a number of useful resources online from the Catholic world in addition to the skimpy notes that I have prepared below and their school religion book. Input from the parents is very important this year as they missed out many classes and the intensive preparation and practice just before the celebration of the sacraments

Let me begin by offering you our heartfelt congratulations on assisting your child to understand about Catholic faith, Mass, forgiveness, sharing the Eucharist and above all making Jesus their friend and guide. This is a time of new beginnings for everyone, especially for your child as s/he takes another step in the faith formation. The Church rejoices with you in this most wonderful time!

After reading this carefully, please do not hesitate to contact the parish office if you have any questions or other needs.

**May God bless you and your family!**

## **Preparing the Mind**

It has always seemed to me that the first step in preparing children for their first Holy Communion is to **help them know our Lord**. After all, how can they love Our Lord if they do not know Him? In order for our children to have even the slightest sense of Who they are receiving in Holy Communion, they need to know the Gospel stories. And they need to know them as well as possible. It is through reading, discussing, and narrating these stories that our children begin to grasp Our Lord's unconditional love and mercy for them. Knowledge of Christ's love for them is the beginning of our children's love for Our Lord and their personal relationship with Him.

## **Preparing the Heart**

As we teach our children about the life of Christ, we also want to **inspire a love for Jesus in the Holy Eucharist**. Our Lord Himself used parables to teach. In a similar manner, we can use stories to inspire our children to greater love for the Holy Eucharist.

Whatever way you instruct and inspire your children, it is very important that your children understand, to the best of their ability, that Christ is really and truly present in the Holy Eucharist. They need to know that once the host is consecrated, it is no longer a piece of bread or a symbol, but truly the body and blood of Christ.

*By the consecration the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is brought about. Under the consecrated species of bread and wine, Christ himself, living and glorious, is present in a true, real, and substantial manner: his Body and his Blood, with his soul and his divinity. – CCC 1413*

For your children, the strongest proof of this is your own heroic efforts to attend Mass. The sacrifices you make to go to Mass, your reverence in church, and your devotion to the Blessed Sacrament are a living witness to the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

## **Preparing the Soul**

You need to **nurture our children's prayer lives**. Bring your children on short visits to the Blessed Sacrament and Adoration and ask the Holy Spirit to fill their souls with love for the Holy Eucharist. Encourage them to spend a few minutes of quiet time in prayer, perhaps at bedtime or early in the morning. Remind your kids that prayer is not just asking God for "stuff" that they want. More importantly, prayer is listening for the voice of God, being attentive to inspirations from the

Holy Spirit, and asking God's grace to act on them. Remind your children that the beautiful white dresses or the handsome suits they wear for their first Holy Communion are meant to be a reflection of the purity of their souls.

Finally, keeping in mind that holiness is the work of the Holy Spirit, let's ask Him to guide us as we prepare our children to receive their First Holy Communion. We do not need to act on every good idea that comes our way. Rather, let's be realistic about what we can do, follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and leave the rest to the grace and mercy of God.

May God bless you and your families as you prepare your children for this beautiful encounter with Our Lord, their First Holy Communion!

### **The Sacraments of First Communion**

The word 'communion' means to be united with. Catholics believe that in holy communion they are united in a special way with Jesus Christ, that they are sharing in the body and blood of Christ the Saviour. Holy Communion, and the whole service (Mass) is also known as Eucharist, from a Greek word meaning thanksgiving.

The occasion of a child's First Communion is a wonderful opportunity for families to deepen and reinvigorate their own faith. It can also be a graced moment of renewal for the broader parish community.

We, in the pastoral area of Dublin 15, is aware of many of the challenges facing parents, guardians and families at the different stages of a child's development. We see moments of engagement with the sacraments as a means of touching into the faith elements in this development.

A lot of the preparation work is carried out through our parish but the home also has important role to play in helping our children and our community to understand what it means to grow into being a full member of the Catholic Church.

### **What do I think parents should keep in mind as they guide their children toward first holy Communion?**

Well, during these days of "unusual" preparation here's my response—four things I'd advise any parent to do to help their child prepare to receive the Eucharist for the first time.

#### **1. Go to Sunday Mass**

Please teach the children how beautiful, important and special it is to receive Jesus' body, blood, soul and divinity in the Eucharist. If receiving

Jesus in holy Communion is wonderful and special, then we would want to at least receive the Eucharist every Sunday. I implore families, don't let "being too busy," sports or anything keep you from going to Mass. I think trying to live a Catholic life without Mass like trying to grow a plant without water. It will wither and die.

**2. Talk about the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist with your child.**

The real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is our belief that the bread and wine truly become the body and blood of Jesus. The Eucharist is not a symbol or a sign, but Jesus truly present. **"presence is not momentary nor simply signified, but wholly and permanently real under each of the consecrated species of bread and wine"**.

**3. Model reverence and focus on the sacrament when celebrating first holy Communion.**

First Holy Communion is an exciting time. There are special outfits, close relatives and friends gathering and making a fuss, parties being planned, and plenty of presents! But please be careful for your child to be too caught up in the clothes, the party and the presents. It would be normal and natural for any child to focus on these happy things. Remind your child why all these wonderful and fun things are happening because they will be receiving Jesus in Holy Communion for the first time.

**4. Receive Communion with reverence and practice receiving Holy Communion at home with your child.**

The more they practice, the more comfortable they will be, and less nervous on the day of first Communion. Also, kids think it is fun to practice!

- A. You can use any sort of small cracker to help them become comfortable with the sequence of how to receive.
- B. Everyone has the personal choice to receive on the tongue or in the hand, **but because the coronavirus communion in the hand only.** When teaching about how to receive in the hand, children should make a throne with their hands as if they are receiving a king. The hands should be one underneath the other, usually the dominant hand on the bottom.
- C. When the priest says **"The body of Christ,"** look at the host and respond **"Amen"** firmly like you believe it!
- D. Use the underneath hand to pick up the host and consume it immediately.

E. Fold hands in prayer and make the sign of the cross and process back to your seat to make a prayer of thanksgiving.

## **5. Praise and thank God for the great gift of Communion.**

St. Pius X called holy Communion **“the shortest and surest way to heaven.”** So not only on the day of first Holy Communion, but after every Communion, we all should praise and thank God the great gift of our Lord received in the Eucharist.

**In short, please do the following with them as part of the final preparation:**

### **1. Talk to them about why Jesus is important to you.**

Explain why you go to mass and take the Holy Sacrament, and how it brings you closer to Him. If you fast before Mass, explain to your child why you do so. Learn to understand your faith and handover it to your child.

### **2. Say a prayer with them.**

Arrive to mass a few minutes early every time you go to Mass. As you leave when mass ends, instead of genuflecting in the aisle, take your child to the tabernacle and genuflect there. This will help bring them closer to the presence of Jesus.

### **3. Explain the Eucharist in terms that are easy for a child to understand.**

Relate the Holy Sacrament to their lives. For instance, discuss:

- The “spiritual food” they will receive through the ritual meal of bread and wine. Just as food nourishes the body, Jesus nourishes our soul through the Eucharist.
- The friendship of Jesus - just as we love our friends, Jesus loves us. Through the Eucharist, He made it possible for us to be with Him (John 15’15).

**"Parents are the primary educators in the faith."**

**General Directory for Catechesis 255**

**"Hence, parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it. The right and duty of parents to give education is essential..."**

**-Blessed John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio**

**Your child looks up to you and therefore, your example and guidance will set a solid, unwavering foundation for their faith.**

## **Practical tips and information to keep in mind:**

- Hand sanitisers will be available at entrance and at the back of the church
- A prayerful atmosphere needs to be maintained while in the church
- **Need to follow social distancing and other regulations and guidelines of HSE at all times.**
- The Sacrament of First Communion this year will be celebrated in small groups. We hope to bring a class together to celebrate the Eucharist and therefore it was important to assign a date and time for each group from the parish. If any of you think the proposed dates or time are not convenient for you because you are away or other reasons please contact the parish office and leave your name and contact number along with your child's name and school to the parish secretary and we will follow it up in September when school reopens.
- The number of **guests is limited to 4 per candidate** (1 candidate and 4 guests)
- It's important that you arrive 10-15 minutes before your time slot.
- Toilet facilities will NOT be provided these days of restrictions
- All are asked to refrain from taking pictures during the celebrations.
- No Group pictures can be done in the church because of social-distancing
- The sacrament will be confirmed within a simple celebration of the Eucharist.
- There will be no booklets available and we hope to have PowerPoints prepared for the celebration.
- One candidate may be requested to read the 'First Reading' Psalm and another candidate for the 'Prayers of the Faithful' on the day
- **All the Candidates, and guests will have designated pews to sit. As the celebration is done according to the class batches, the number of guests allowed are limited. We also request all guests present to be from the same household as there will not be space for social distancing. This necessitates that families and people living in the same household to be invited as guests and sit together.**
- Holy Communion will be brought to the places where you are sitting.
- Handbags and all other accessories may not be kept with the candidate during the celebration of the Mass

- Gloves needs to be removed to receive the Eucharist.
- Eucharist will be given only on the tongue
- No one will be permitted to enter the sanctuary area of the church.
- **Please leave the church promptly after the celebration of the sacrament (in 15 minutes as the church needs to be sanitised for the next group and left for some reasonable time before the next celebration.**
- Those who wish may make a donation to the church on the day of the ceremony
- All celebrations will be short and simple celebrations
- The celebration can be followed live via parish website.

Thank you.

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