ON THE FREQUENT USE OF THE MOST HOLY SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST (DE FREQUENTI USU)

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Title Page

A Little Book on the Frequent Use of the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist

By the Reverend Father Christopher Madridius, Doctor of Theology, of the Society of Jesus.

Preface

That in these turbulent times the impiety of the heretics assails the most holy Sacrament of the Eucharist with so hostile a mind ought not to seem so very strange to those devoted to the Christian name and to the lovers of Jesus, since the demons, by whom the obstinacy of the heretics is strengthened, hate nothing more than this sacrosanct mystery, in which the passion of Christ is most perfectly represented: by which Lucifer was despoiled of the tyranny with which he lorded it most proudly over the whole human race. But that Christian and religious men should be so hostile to the frequenting of this mystery that they do not cease (led by I know not what spirit) with all their strength and with great obstinacy to dissuade from it and to attack it as dangerous, and even superstitious, with great offence to the Church of God and to pious men, I cannot but grieve at exceedingly; and I wonder how they do not see Satan, now no longer transforming himself into an angel of light,[1] but openly envying the most abundant grace which in so great a Sacrament is most liberally communicated to us (when it is worthily received), by which we may extinguish his most wicked darts,[2] with which he continually assails us, lest we attain that beatitude which he himself lost by his pride. For I do not wish, out of Christian modesty, to think that the men who spread this pernicious doctrine in the Church of God are driven by a perverse and wicked mind; but perhaps by a kind of zeal[3] which, I trust, I shall by the grace of Christ plainly show not to be according to knowledge, in the explanation of the question to be treated presently, from which it will be clearly established that the frequenting of the most holy Eucharist out of love of Christ is more useful and more fruitful than abstaining from it out of fear of irreverence. May Christ the Lord grant that all may behold this truth. For our part, we certainly profess that we have set before ourselves no other end of this labour we have undertaken than the consideration of the divine glory and of the salvation of souls (which is the one aim of the whole Society of Jesus). Hence we earnestly beg the reader to credit to God, the author of all good things, whatever in this little book shall please him; but if anything shall displease him, let him look to the mind and intention of us who are zealous for the common good.

[1] 2 Corinthians 11.

[2] Ephesians 6.

[3] Romans 10.

Chapter I: The Proposition of the Question to Be Discussed, with Three Principles Suited to Explaining the Matter

The question, then, which is put forward to be discussed and resolved is this: whether, if someone can receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist rightly, and can nevertheless abstain without sin, he does better by receiving frequently than by abstaining. But that the whole matter may be more plainly understood, and that we may proceed from what is better known, we shall set forth three principles, of which the first will be [this].

Although in devout persons, both religious and secular, who are not too much occupied in secular and profane business, which draws the mind too far away from divine things, the daily reception of the holy Eucharist is praiseworthy and fruitful, and this is confirmed by the authority of most weighty Doctors, both ancient saints and recent Scholastics, and most firm reasons also prove it (as we shall show later), so that men of this kind are worthy not of blame but rather of the very greatest praise: nevertheless, what we intend in this disputation is this, namely, that the frequenting of Communion, at least every eighth day, is for those who approach worthily more praiseworthy, more useful and more fruitful than abstaining from such frequenting.

The second principle is this: except for certain cases in which, according to the opinion of the Doctors, one is commanded by precept to communicate, anyone can abstain from Communion without sin for the rest of the year, even one who is in a state in which he can praiseworthily communicate, because then, since he is bound by no law, he will not sin by abstaining from Communion. Hence when it is said that it is more praiseworthy and more useful to communicate frequently than to abstain, we by no means understand that those who abstain from frequent Communion are on that account bound by any sin, but that those who frequent it out of love do better than those who withdraw out of fear, although these can do so without fault. In this matter, however, we for our part desire to appear more moderate than our adversaries, since we do not wish to reprehend those who, out of reverence for so great a Sacrament, abstain from Communion, but with St Augustine and St Thomas we allow them to act according to their faith; whereas they, on the contrary, in a manner hardly Christian, and against those same Doctors, do not cease to reprehend and deter those who approach so salutary a Sacrament out of devotion and love.

The third principle: that one may be said to receive this Sacrament praiseworthily, he must approach worthily. But worthiness can here be understood in three ways. First, for a certain natural value and condignity (to speak in the manner of the theological school) of the one who receives this Sacrament; and in this way no creature, however excellent, not even the Blessed Virgin herself, could worthily receive this most worthy Sacrament. For what is man, or any other creature, that he should be compared with God? Or what proportion is there of the finite to the infinite? Next, worthiness can be taken for a certain perfection of virtues and gifts, and especially of reverence and devotion, so that he is said to receive worthily who receives with a certain eminence of virtues and with great reverence and devotion; otherwise he would be said to receive unworthily. But neither is this worthiness required for the worthy reception of this Sacrament; indeed, those things are often bestowed by God in its frequent use. For since they are gifts of God, they are both given and increased in the

frequenting of so great a Sacrament. Hence Gerson says: "Those who will not approach this mystery without such gifts are like cold people who will not approach the fire unless they are first warm."

Lastly, worthiness is taken for the disposition which God requires in a man, that he may receive the Eucharist without offence to Him. And this, in a sinner, is nothing other than either a diligent searching out of his sins, and detestation of them, and a constant purpose of amending his life, with a true and entire confession of all his offences (adding moreover that no prohibition of superiors stand in the way); or, in one who is not conscious to himself of any crime committed, faith that worketh by charity. And this is the worthiness that is required in order that one may approach this Sacrament worthily. But he who approaches without this disposition without doubt approaches unworthily, and of him Paul says: "He that eateth unworthily, eateth judgment to himself";[1] and the same Paul requires this disposition when he says: "But let a man prove himself: and so let him eat of that bread," and so on. In this disposition also are included all the things which the holy Doctors require for the worthy reception of this Sacrament. But if in some places of their teaching they seem to require certain eminent virtues, we judge that they demand them not as necessary but as conducive, since the greater the disposition of the recipient, the more bountifully the most liberal Lord confers His gifts.

[1] 1 Corinthians 11.

From these things it follows that imperfection of the virtues, and a diminution of devotion and reverence which does not exclude this worthiness, does not render a man unworthy to receive this Sacrament; indeed, that he can receive fruitfully and usefully with that diminution of reverence and devotion, which in the very reception are often bestowed and increased by the power of the Sacrament.

Chapter II: How Grievously They Sin Who Approach the Sacrament of the Eucharist Unworthily

The most excellent dignity of this Sacrament shows us how shameful it is to approach it without the disposition and worthiness spoken of in the third way: and this will be still more evident to us if with the keen gaze of the mind we consider that in it Christ, God and our Redeemer, is received, who, since He is supreme equity, hates nothing so much as iniquity and sin. For "to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike,"[1] as the Wise Man says. And in the Psalms it is said: "Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity."[2] And the Lord through Moses abhors the wicked.[3] And rightly indeed. "For what participation," says Paul, "hath justice with iniquity?[4] Or what fellowship hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial?" The same Paul also teaches this elsewhere, when he says: "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself": that is, according to the Gloss, by his eating he makes himself deserving of damnation.[5] And Chrysostom: "This sacrifice," he says, "is spiritual food. As bodily food, when it finds the stomach occupied by contrary humours, harms the more, and does greater injury, and affords no help, so this spiritual food also, if it finds anyone polluted with malice, will the more destroy him, not by its own nature but by the fault of the one who receives it."

[1] Wisdom 14.

[2] Psalm 5.

[3] Exodus 23.

[4] 2 Corinthians 6.

[5] 1 Corinthians 11.

Bernard also, in *On the Manner of Living, to His Sister*, in the sermon on Communion, says: "What, then, does the sinner eat, and what does he drink? Not, indeed, the flesh and blood spiritually unto his salvation, but judgment unto his damnation, although he seems to receive the Sacrament of the altar along with the rest." And in the same sermon: "The body of the Lord is without doubt life to those to whom Christ is life; but it is death to those who through fault and ignorance and negligence are members of the devil." Moreover, how grave a crime it is, and how great a ruin the unworthy reception of this Sacrament brings with it, is gathered from this: that it is compared by the saints to the betrayal of Judas. Hence St Jerome, in a certain letter to priests: "Tell me," he says, "whoever you may be who receive the sacraments, how do you kiss the Son of God with those lips with which you have kissed the lips of a harlot? O Judas, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" And St Augustine: "They sin no less who deliver Christ to sinful members than those who delivered Christ to the Jews who crucified Him. For these thrust Christ into the place of sin, which is in the power of the demons, just as Judas delivered Him into the wicked hands of the Jews." St Remigius also: "Woe," he says, "to those who deliver Christ to be crucified; but woe to those who receive Him under the Sacrament with an evil conscience. These, although they do not deliver Him to the Jews to be crucified, yet deliver Him to the members of the enemy to be received." And St Bernard, in the sermon on the Lord's Supper: "For those who live according to the flesh, and wander after carnal things, shackled with the chain of vices, receive poison with Judas the traitor; they incur the noose of spiritual hanging, to be most grievously damned, both for their manifold guilt and for contempt of

the Sacrament, which they truly receive, but in its essence, not in its saving efficacy." Bede also says: "Woe for ever to that man who approaches the table of the Lord unworthily. For after the example of Judas he betrays the Son of Man, not indeed to sinful Jews, but to sinful members, namely his own: they who rashly presume to receive the Sacrament of the Lord's body."

The unworthy reception is also compared by the Doctors to the sin of those who crucified Christ. For just as the crucifiers of Christ, who of His own accord, out of exceeding charity, was willing to pour out His life for the salvation of men, maliciously slew Him to their own ruin, so also those who communicate unworthily make void, as far as in them lies, the memorial of Christ's passion, which He out of exceeding love had left as a saving medicine for the expiation of sins, receiving it not unto salvation for themselves but unto everlasting destruction. And indeed the Jews, if they had known the King of glory, would never have crucified Him; but you, as often as you receive this saving Sacrament unworthily, so often, as far as in you lies, knowingly and willingly fasten Christ to the cross. Moreover, that none but the pure and upright, and those free from every stain of sin, ought to approach the sacrosanct mystery of the Eucharist was signified in Exodus,[6] when Aaron and his sons were commanded that, when about to approach the altar to offer incense upon it to the Lord, they should not, unless they had first washed their hands and feet, enter the tabernacle of the testimony. But if such cleanness of body was necessary for those about to approach the altar of incense, shall we, who are under the law of grace, approach to receive the body of Christ with unwashed souls? The same is also prefigured in Leviticus, where we read:[7] "If any of the seed of Aaron have a blemish, let him not offer loaves to God, nor approach to his mystery." Christ also, in John, would not give His body to the disciples unless their feet had first been washed.[8] By this He certainly declared clearly enough that the depraved affections of souls must be purged before one approaches the holy reception of His body. And that He wished to signify this to us is gathered from this: that although He had not forbidden His disciples to take common food with unwashed hands, to this Sacrament He did not permit them to approach except with washed feet, that is, with depraved affections purged.[9] And because Judas did not have these clean for its reception, though the outward washing of the feet had been done, he met a most wretched end: for, hanged by a halter, he was cast down to hell, to be tormented with eternal torments. And Paul[10] recalls what danger awaits those who dare to receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist with an impure mind: "Therefore," he says, "are there many infirm and weak among you, and many sleep." From these things, and from others which I pass over for brevity's sake, it is clear enough how wicked a crime it is to receive so worthy a Sacrament unworthily. But I have brought these things forward lest those who reprehend the frequenting of it should think that we approve of those who approach with a foul mouth and an unclean heart, since we blame them most of all, and with Paul exhort each one that a man prove himself, and so eat of that bread: let him prove himself, I say, by true contrition and an entire confession of his sins; let him prove himself by a change from a worse life to a holy life, to a life worthy of so great a guest. For the question does not turn on this: whether the wicked and unworthy man does better by frequenting this Sacrament than by abstaining. For it is already clear from what has been said above that he not only does not do better, but acts most wickedly, if he receives even once. But what is asked here is this: whether one who is in that state in which he can praiseworthily communicate does better and more fruitfully by frequenting such Communion than by abstaining from it and communicating only once or twice in the year.

[6] Exodus 30.

[7] Leviticus 21.

[8] John 13.

[9] Matthew 15.

[10] [1] Corinthians 11.

Chapter III: The Arguments of the Adversaries, and the Replies to Them

The question being thus understood, some who seem to themselves religious judge it more right and more useful to abstain from frequent Communion than to communicate frequently; and they vehemently reprehend those who think the contrary and who frequent holy Communion itself; and they strive to prove their opinion by many reasons, which we shall set forth one by one in order, and, having set them forth, shall refute: from which it will appear on how weak a foundation they rest in asserting a doctrine so paradoxical that, whether you look at and consult the ancient Fathers and forebears or the more recent writers, scarcely any competent author is to be found who does not vehemently dissent from them in this matter.

Let this, then, be the first reason: that Christ the Lord gave Himself in the Sacrament only once, and that at the Last Supper, after its institution; therefore we ought not to approach this sacrosanct mystery so frequently.

To which it is answered: that the paschal lamb was a figure of the death of Christ and of this Sacrament; but in so far as it was a figure of this Sacrament, it was fulfilled at the Last Supper, when Christ instituted this Sacrament and gave it to all His Apostles; and since His death followed immediately, there was no need to give this same thing to them again: although in truth, according to the opinion of Chrysostom and Augustine and other most weighty Doctors,[1] Christ after the resurrection gave Communion to the two disciples whom, as they were making for Emmaus, He joined as a companion, where they recognized the Lord in the breaking of bread. But we see that He approved this frequenting sufficiently when, during the supper, the Sacrament having now been instituted and given to His disciples, He exhorted them to do the same: "Do this,"[2] He said, "for a commemoration of me."[3] And this they themselves observed carefully enough, as we shall presently show from the Acts of the Apostles and from Paul.

[1] Chrysostom, homily 17 on Matthew. Augustine, *De consensu Evangelistarum*, book 3. Luke 24.

[2] Luke 22.

[3] 1 Corinthians 11.

Next they will bring forward those well-known examples: namely, that St Mark the Evangelist cut off his own thumb so that he might be found unfit for the priesthood, on the authority of Jerome in the prologue to Mark; also that St Francis and other most holy men refused the priesthood out of reverence for so great a Sacrament; and also that St Benedict abstained from Communion for a long time. Therefore we, who are most guilty, ought not to approach it so boldly.

But it is easy to answer with Gerson, chancellor of Paris, that the deeds of certain saints ought, by a pious interpretation, rather to be venerated and admired by us than imitated: for there are gifts and callings in different persons, as the Holy Spirit wills. For the Lord has wrought various things in His saints, in whom He is always and everywhere wonderful, for the commending of different virtues. For on the other side, St Gregory, in the fourth [book] of the Dialogues, relates that Cassius, Bishop of Narni, who had been accustomed to offer the daily sacrifice to God, and immolated himself in tears amid the very secrets of the sacrifices, received a command from the Lord, who said: "Work what thou workest; let not thy foot cease, let not thy hand cease; on the feast of the Apostles thou shalt

come to me, and I will pay thee thy reward"; and that after seven years, on that very feast of the Apostles, when he had celebrated the solemnities of the Mass, he forthwith passed to the Lord. Hence, therefore, it must be understood that this virtue pleased God in one, and that in another. Moreover, although in those saints the humility and modesty are praised with which they refused the priesthood because of the greatness of its dignity, it does not follow from this that they did not communicate frequently; indeed it must be most firmly believed that St Mark followed the traditions of the other Apostles and the custom of the nascent Church, in which Communion was frequented, as is found in the Acts, in the second chapter, where we read: "All the faithful were persevering in the doctrine of the Apostles, in communication, and in the breaking of bread." And that this was the custom and discipline of the rising Church we shall show later at greater length. We can also piously believe that St Francis, most religious as he was, made use of frequent Communion. But if St Benedict is read to have abstained from Communion for a long time, we judge that he did not do this because he feared to approach this Sacrament, with which, when he saw death at hand, he so piously and religiously fortified himself; but because, when he had resolved to withdraw into a vast solitude, where he lay hidden for a long time, removed from the company of men, he could not make use of sacramental reception, but enjoyed only the spiritual. But when he betook himself to monasteries to lead a common life with others, we do not doubt that, in keeping with his devotion to Christ, he returned to his former frequenting of it, which we most firmly believe he had practised before his departure to the desert. But if the matter is otherwise, the frequent use of the holy Eucharist is not on that account to be reprehended, which so many most holy and most learned Fathers have so greatly commended by their words, their deeds and their practice (as we shall show later).

They say moreover: Paul admonishes, "Let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of that bread," etc.[4] But this proof, which is employed so that one may approach worthily and not eat judgement to himself, is difficult and dangerous, because "no man knoweth whether he be worthy of love or hatred."[5] And: "He that loveth danger shall perish in it."[6] Therefore it is safer to communicate rarely than often.

[4] 1 Corinthians 11.

[5] Ecclesiastes 9.

[6] Ecclesiasticus 3.

This objection is overthrown by what we laid down in the third principle. For the proof which St Paul requires is, in a sinner, a diligent examination of conscience and contrition for all mortal sins, with a firm resolve to amend one's life, and with an entire confession of the same; or, in one who is justified, faith that worketh by charity, which the scholastic doctors call formed faith. Whoever has done this from his heart, trusting more in the grace of Christ than in himself, approaches sufficiently proved. For in this proof no supernatural certainty is required, by which a man should know that he is free from sin or pleasing to God, because this is had only by revelation; nor is natural certainty required, such as is had of necessary or contingent things known by experience; but moral certainty suffices, which arises from probable conjectures, such as suffices in moral business and in human acts, as the Philosopher says in the first [book] of the Ethics. And this certainty is sufficiently had through the proof already set down. Nor is that proof so very difficult, provided one is willing to apply diligence. And if it is in some way difficult, it is surely far more difficult for him who receives the Eucharist only once a year, since according to the teaching of the saints there is no easier way of disposing oneself

well than the frequent reception of this sacrament. To that [saying] of Ecclesiastes, "No man knoweth whether he be worthy of love or hatred," it can be answered, first, that he speaks of love or hatred that is final, as is gathered from what follows in the same context: "but all things are kept uncertain for the time to come." Or it can be said that no one knows [it] with supernatural or natural certainty, as was said above, but that one can easily [know it] with moral certainty; and this of itself suffices for one to approach proved; nor does he who approaches thus love danger. For a sick man who takes medicine on the judgement and advice of an excellent and most skilful physician by no means exposes himself to the danger of death, but on the contrary provides for his health on the best of grounds and safeguards his life.

They object besides that Augustine, in the book *De ecclesiasticis dogmatibus*, writes thus: "To receive the communion of the Eucharist daily I neither praise nor blame." Therefore, so as not to expose oneself to the danger of sinning, it is better to abstain than to frequent Communion.

To this argument we say, first, that that book *De ecclesiasticis dogmatibus*, in the judgement of many most learned men, did not come out of Augustine's workshop but was written by Alcuin, as is gathered from John Trithemius, *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis*. And how true this is may be understood even from this, that Augustine himself, in many places of his teaching, either approves the daily reception of the most holy Eucharist and exhorts Christians to it, or at least allows each one to act according to the devotion of his faith, as we shall show more plainly later. But let that book be whose you will, Augustine's or Alcuin's: certainly that authority which the adversaries make so much of is so far from opposing our purpose that it even confirms in the highest degree this truth which we assert. For where he says, "To receive the communion of the Eucharist daily I neither praise nor blame," he immediately adds: "Yet I counsel and exhort that all should communicate on every Sunday, provided however that the mind be without affection for sin." From which words [it follows that] to frequent Communion at least on Sundays will be more praiseworthy than to abstain, since that author exhorts us to it. And this is what is chiefly at issue in the question proposed. Moreover, after he had said here, "To receive Communion daily I neither praise nor blame," the same [author], writing to Januarius in Letter 118, speaks thus: "If anyone says that the Eucharist is not to be received daily, [and] another affirms [that it is to be received] daily, let each one do what according to his faith he piously believes ought to be done." Therefore, if Augustine does not blame those who communicate daily, but counsels that each one should do what according to his faith he piously believes ought to be done, why do you so readily and rashly blame those who out of devotion, and according to their faith, piously wish to communicate daily? To use the same argument that St Catherine of Siena used when a certain man objected to her so frequent Communion with this authority of Augustine, and she answered him thus before many people (as St Antoninus writes in her life): "Since Augustine does not reproach me in his sayings, why do you, Reverend Father, reproach me?" But if Augustine, or whoever else that author was, neither praises nor blames those who communicate daily, this is not so because it is less excellent to communicate daily, but because, since this is one of those things that can be turned to either side, it can be received well and ill, with fruit and with ruin. For as it is life to the good, so also it is death to the wicked. Nor indeed, if anyone receives it with faith and devotion, does he fail to receive it well and with most abundant fruit. Let them therefore cease to object everywhere the authority of this Doctor; for since he plainly makes against them and confirms our truth, in this very thing they betray either their ignorance or their perverse disposition. How much more rightly would they act if, the darkness of falsehood now dispelled, in the presence of this light

of truth they thought with us, nay rather with all orthodox and Catholic doctors, and together with that excellent Doctor exhorted all to communicate at least on Sundays and to taste how sweet the Lord is.

Some also bring forward against frequent Communion that [saying] of St Bonaventure in *De profectu religiosorum*,[7] that scarcely anyone seems to be so made that it does not suffice him to communicate once a week by custom.

[7] Bonaventure, book 2, ch. 78.

To which we answer, first, that St Bonaventure does not here disapprove of Communion once a week, which would be enough for our purpose. We affirm, next, that by these words more frequent Communion is the less blamed if there is some cause for it, since he says, "It suffices to communicate once a week, unless a special cause or reason counsel [communicating] more often"; but he seems to dissuade only from Communion frequented from custom more than from devotion. And that this is the mind of this Doctor we perceive from this, that a little later, after enumerating the wonderful effects of the most holy Eucharist, he adds: "Yet it is wholesome," he says, "and useful that a man should often prepare himself for the reception of that medicine, and strive to receive it as devoutly as he can," etc. And shortly after: "And although [he be] lukewarm," he says, "yet trusting in the mercy of God let him approach with confidence." Thus far he. Hence it is sufficiently clear from the opinion of this man that, although it be enough to communicate once a week, yet more frequent Communion is not forbidden to anyone who is well prepared. As if a skilled physician were to tell some healthy man that it would be enough for him to eat twice a day, he would not thereby forbid him, if this healthy man felt a need of food and a digestive power fit to convert it into the substance of the one nourished, to eat three times a day, since he would see that this too would be with great fruit and benefit. Wherefore, if we look to the excellence and dignity of the sacrament and to our own lowliness and unworthiness, it will be enough for us to communicate, I do not say once a week, but once in our life. But if we consider the kindness and liberality of Christ, who of his own accord invites us to this sacred banquet, there is no reason why we should fear to approach frequently, provided we approach proved (as we have said).

They will say further against [us]: the safer way is always to be held; but since in spiritual communion there is no danger, whereas in sacramental [communion], because great proof and purity are required, there is much danger, it is better to communicate often spiritually and rarely sacramentally.

If this argument proved anything, it would also prove that the Eucharist is never to be received; for danger would always be feared. What can be said more absurd than this? But St Bonaventure refutes this argument thus: "Even if it be safer to communicate spiritually than sacramentally, yet it is more profitable to communicate sacramentally." The objection can also be removed in another way, if it be denied that it is safer to communicate spiritually than sacramentally; nay, we contend that it is equally safe, because the interior disposition which is required for worthy spiritual reception is thought to be the same that suffices for worthy sacramental reception; for, in order that [it] be received worthily in a spiritual manner, the conscience must be free from any capital crime, and this suffices for worthy sacramental reception; and therefore the security is equal, because the exterior dispositions which are required, such as fasting and other things, are certain enough and free from danger. Moreover, we say that it is not only equally safe to communicate sacramentally but even more

so, as Adrian says in his [commentary on the] Fourth [Book of the Sentences]. For by approaching more frequently, through the virtue of the *opus operatum* of the sacrament, a man who would otherwise be guilty of sin often obtains pardon of the sin rather than binding himself by the reception to a new sin, provided however that he strives diligently to instruct and prepare himself so as to receive worthily. For that is reckoned less safe in which harm occurs more regularly, as happens in spiritual reception, in which that grace is not conferred which in sacramental reception is received by the power of the sacrament itself. Nor is anyone to be said to expose himself to the danger of death when he makes use of remedies from which he can gather by probable conjecture that he will obtain health. As therefore he who entrusts himself to most skilful physicians is not to be said to cast himself into the danger of death, even if death should follow, so for him who, having first applied fitting care and diligence, communicates according to the counsel of Paul, Communion is not to be called dangerous.

They add moreover: He who communicates frequently looks to his own advantage, but he who abstains out of reverence regards the glory of God and the dignity of [his] Majesty, which out of humility he fears to approach; but it is better to think of the glory of God than of one's own advantage; therefore it is better to abstain than to frequent [Communion].

To this we answer by denying that he who communicates sacramentally consults only his own advantage and profit. Nay rather, we contend that he takes much more account of the divine glory. For when he approaches this sacrament, he sets forth the supreme charity of God, by which he deigned to suffer on the cross for us; he sets forth [his] supreme power, by which he willed so wonderfully to give himself to us under so small a species of the sacrament; he sets forth [his] infinite goodness, by which it pleased him to give himself to us, unworthy as we are, as the food of life for the refreshment of the soul; he sets forth, finally, [his] ineffable wisdom, [by which he willed] to restore us in the same order in which we fell from the state of innocence. Hence Innocent says: "Man ate the bread of angels, so that whence death arose, thence life might rise again."

Next they say: One should not approach Communion frequently, lest from frequenting it we come to contempt of so precious a gift. For too much familiarity (as the common saying goes) breeds contempt. Therefore one should approach more rarely, so that one may approach more reverently.

It is answered: Although among common men familiarity is wont to breed contempt, among the wise and perfect, however, it falls out far otherwise. For the more they perceive someone's virtues and excellence, the more they admire and venerate him. But since, in the condition of this wretched life, no one is found so wise and perfect as not to suffer from some defect which betrays itself through too great familiarity, it comes about that sometimes, from too great familiarity, the opinion and esteem in which someone is held is lessened. But a wise man will never come to contempt on account of any defects whatsoever, since there is no one who lives without sin, by the testimony of John, who says:[8] "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." But since Christ, our God and Redeemer, is of infinite perfection and inexplicable goodness, which we cannot grasp because of the weakness of our understanding and the narrowness of our power, through the contemplation and use of this adorable sacrament we draw nearer to the knowledge of them; and the more frequently we receive it, the more plainly we perceive the goodness of Christ and the benefits conferred on us through him. Hence this familiarity is so far from breeding contempt (if we approach with faith and love of him) that, penetrating through it into the infinite sea of the divine perfection

and excellence, we are even carried away into a most ardent love, devotion and worship of him, and, wholly filled with reverence, adoring with the inmost submission of the soul the so immense liberality and goodness of God and of our Christ, we prostrate ourselves. For if the angels, who know God most perfectly, with whom they converse most familiarly and continually, unceasingly praise his majesty, which the Dominations adore and before which the Powers tremble, and the Cherubim also and Seraphim cease not daily to cry out, saying, "Holy, holy, holy," how shall we, if, having grasped and seen into the meaning of so great a mystery, we approach frequently, despise the giver of such great goods and our most kind Redeemer, and not rather adore his majesty with the greatest reverence and religion we can, and embrace his supreme and singular goodness and kindness?

[8] 1 John [1].

But (they will object again) we see that those who communicate frequently are taken up with secular business and make little progress in the way of the Lord, and do not cultivate their life with better and more honourable conduct; which thing can, and commonly does, very greatly offend the people of God, since rather, as St Augustine warns, he who would receive life ought to change his life.

But it is answered that it has been found by experience that in those who frequent this divine mystery with faith and devotion a wonderful change of life and conduct takes place, since they pluck out of their souls lust, unchastity, ambition, pride, avarice and the other diseases of human life, and in the place of those vices bring in the contrary virtues: temperance, chastity, humility, liberality, patience, and contempt of worldly things. And if some, taken with the love of those things, soothed by the allurements of human life, and weighed down by empty cares, frequent this holy Communion, this happens because it is not faith or charity towards God that leads them, but rather hypocrisy or avarice. Such men, if only they are Catholics, we believe to be found very few. But if those who frequent Communion sometimes fall into some sin, even a deadly one, holy Communion, which brings forth such abundant fruits for us, is not on that account to be blamed, since this proceeds either from ignorance or from the weakness of our nature. For it is not the case that, because one communicates frequently, he is at once confirmed in grace, so that he can sin no more; but the free faculty of acting either well or ill is preserved in him. For Peter, after receiving Communion from Christ himself, on that very night denied him, affirming with an oath and with cursing that he had not known him.[9] And all the disciples, at almost the very same hour in which they had received Communion, forsook Christ, whom they had promised to follow most constantly even unto death and never to deny, and, forgetful of their faith and their promise, fled. For God sometimes permits his own to fall, so that, acknowledging their weakness, they may be humbled under his almighty hand[10] and be converted to him more eagerly and ardently; whence Paul says: "When I am weak, then am I powerful."[11] And in the Psalm it is said: "Fill their faces with shame; and they shall seek thy name, O Lord."[12] But if some, from Communion, betake themselves to servile works and secular business (honest, however, and lawful, and not calling the mind much away from the spirit, for it is of these that we speak), we judge that they are by no means to be blamed, since in simple men, abject in the opinion of the crowd, that divine Spirit very often deigns to prepare for himself a worthy dwelling in which to rest.

[9] Matthew 26.

[10] 1 Peter 5.

[11] 2 Corinthians 12.

[12] Psalm 82.

They will press further and say: If frequent Communion were so useful and fruitful, it would certainly be enjoined by the Church, and instituted and practised in religious orders and monasteries. But nothing of the kind is commanded by the Church, nor prescribed in religious orders. Therefore it does not seem to be so useful.

To which it is answered: at the beginning of the infant Church, in which charity flourished, it was for a long time the custom that they communicated daily or frequently, as is evident from the Acts of the Apostles 2,[13] and as we shall show a little later from Jerome and others. Pope Anacletus also instituted and commanded that all the faithful should communicate when the consecration had been completed, and that those who refused should be kept from the thresholds of the church. Afterwards it was decreed in the Church that they should communicate every Sunday. Later, when charity was growing lukewarm, Pope Fabian ordained that they should communicate at least three times a year: at Easter, Pentecost and the Nativity. Finally, when charity was now growing cold and almost extinct, Innocent III, in the *Extra*, *De poenitentiis et remissionibus*, chapter *Omnis*, decreed that they should communicate at least once a year, and that at Easter. Here it is especially to be noted that, although the Church, governed by the Holy Spirit, has so often changed the precept of communicating according to the condition of the times, she has never forbidden communicating more frequently, but rather has forbidden that it be forbidden, as is found in *De consecratione*, distinction 2, chapter *Non prohibeat*,[14] which we shall bring forward later. And if in this our age that ancient and praiseworthy custom of communicating more frequently is being renewed by Christ's faithful, surely the lovers of his passion and of divine worship, and those zealous for Christian piety, ought to give immense thanks to God, if they have any Christian sense, that some likeness of that happy infant Church is now beginning to appear, and charity, almost extinct, to be roused and to revive through faith and devotion towards this glorious and illustrious sacrament. But to what is said about religious orders, we answer: in all truly approved religious orders it is the custom that all priests communicate daily, or at least very frequently. As for deacons and lay brothers, some of them have laid down that they should communicate every week, others every month; nor do they forbid them to approach more frequently if they observe that someone is led by faith and devotion, judging from his conduct and life. And if such frequent Communion is forbidden to some, it is to be piously believed that they are led by humility or some honest reason, so as to guard against the dangers that are sometimes wont to arise from the malice of men; which, however, is not to be brought forward as a universal rule, since innumerable fathers and religious men often exhort monks to the frequenting of Communion; among whom is Blessed Apollonius, who (as is found in the Lives of the Fathers) advised that, if it could be done, the monks should communicate daily, lest anyone who withdrew himself far from the sacrament should be withdrawn from God. And St Jerome, who in the Rule to Eustochium, chapter 19, does the same, as we shall show in its place.

[13] Acts 2.

[14] *De consecratione*, distinction 2.

They will also affirm that one should abstain from frequent Communion, because from it (as they think) there follows a lessening of reverence and of worship towards so great a sacrament; and [that] according to the opinion of the doctors, those who feel a diminution of reverence and devotion in

frequenting the Eucharist ought to abstain, so that afterwards they may approach more reverently and religiously.

To this we say that St Thomas, on the fourth [book of the] Sentences, distinction 12 (from which the adversaries have taken the material of the argument they object), writes thus: "In this sacrament two things are required on the part of the receiver, namely the desire of union with Christ, which love produces, and reverence for the sacrament, which belongs to the gift of fear. The first of these incites to the daily frequenting of this sacrament, but the second holds back. Hence if anyone had found by experience that from daily reception the fervour of love is increased and reverence not lessened, such a one ought to communicate daily; but if he felt that by daily frequenting reverence is lessened and fervour not much increased, such a one ought sometimes to abstain, so that afterwards he might approach with greater reverence and devotion. Hence, as far as this goes, each one is to be left to his own judgement." From these words of Thomas, when he says, "If anyone feels from daily reception that the fervour of love is increased in him and reverence not lessened, he ought to communicate daily," it is gathered that it is falsely said, "He who communicates frequently will always feel a diminution of devotion and reverence." Otherwise the distinction of St Thomas would be void, if no one felt that increase from frequenting [the sacrament]; and this opinion, besides being rash and against the mind of so great a Doctor, would also condemn innumerable religious and secular men who communicate daily or frequently with great fruit (as is to be believed) and increase of devotion. Next, I should like to learn from you how you know that those who communicate daily do not feel such an increase of devotion, since they themselves say that they experience it and therefore approach frequently, and St Thomas, together with Augustine, advises that each one is to be left to the judgement of his own discretion?

But if you do not feel such an increase, abstain in the Lord: certainly no one will trouble you. Only leave others to the judgement of their own discretion, and allow them to rejoice frequently in so heavenly a gift and in interior consolation. Moreover, when St Thomas says, "Whoever should feel that through such frequent reception his reverence is lessened and his devotion not increased ought to abstain at times," he does not say, "He ought to abstain for a year, or for months, or for some long time," but "at times," that is, for as long as he is preparing himself, so that he may approach more reverently and more devoutly. For this preparation years or months are not required; any time, however short, will be enough. For it is not length of time that makes a man reverent or devout, but, on the one hand, preparation through the consideration of so great a majesty and the knowledge of his own vileness and unworthiness, and, on the other, the change from a worse life into a better. This St Ambrose teaches us with a certain supreme piety when he says: "So live that you may deserve to receive daily: he who does not deserve to receive daily does not deserve to receive after a year."[15] It must be noted, however, that although St Thomas held that opinion (a probable one indeed, and one that in no way tells against our truth), there are nevertheless many other most learned men who assert that, even if some do not feel an increase of devotion and reverence, but rather a diminution (provided contempt be absent), these ought not on that account to abstain from frequent Communion; because remarkable and singular devotion and reverence are not necessary for a worthy reception, as we made plain in the third principle. Hence St Bonaventure, a man most versed in spiritual matters and devout above all, in book 2 of *De profectu religiosorum*, ch. 78, speaking of the frequent reception of this most sacred mystery, admonishes us most piously and religiously: "And although," he says, "[he approach] sometimes tepidly, yet, trusting in the mercy of God, let him

approach with confidence. For if he considers himself unworthy, let him reflect that he is the more in want of the physician, and has the more need to seek him, the more he feels himself sick. For 'they that are in health need not a physician, but they that are ill.' Nor do you seek to unite yourself to Christ in order that you may sanctify him, but that you may be sanctified by him." And he adds: "Nor on that account is Holy Communion to be omitted, if at times a man does not feel a special grace of devotion when he strives to prepare himself for it, or if in the very reception, or afterwards, he perhaps feels himself less devout than he would wish." Do you see with what piety of words this Doctor teaches us that Communion is not to be omitted, even though in the very reception, or afterwards, we feel ourselves tepid and less devout, when we strive to prepare ourselves for it? Doubtless it is because of the manifold grace of virtues and gifts which, in the very reception, are most kindly conferred on us by almighty God. And if these are often not so clearly perceived and felt by us, we cannot on that account say that they are any the less bestowed by God. For (as Blessed Lawrence Justinian wisely writes) just as bodily food nourishes us even if we do not feel it, so the Eucharist, at times without our feeling it, divinely refreshes and strengthens the soul with an increase of grace and an abundance of many gifts. Therefore that does not follow which our adversaries seem to imply, namely that grace and gifts are conferred the less because some do not feel them in the reception of the Eucharist.

[15] Ambrose, *De sacramentis*, book 5, ch. 4.

Lastly they insist: "Those who seldom approach this Sacrament approach with great devotion; but those who approach often approach coldly and without devotion, out of a certain habit rather than out of devotion; as we see in many priests who celebrate out of obligation or in hope of gain, as irreverently and undevoutly as if they were doing any other work, however profane, to their own ruin and to the great offence of the Christian people. Therefore it is clearly evident that it is better to approach Communion seldom than frequently."

But this, which our adversaries lay down as the firmest foundation of their objection, we reject as altogether false; and we deny that those who approach seldom approach with great devotion, and that those who communicate frequently communicate coldly and without devotion; since we find by almost daily experience that the contrary is truer. For we see those who approach frequently approach with many tears and sighs, which show clearly enough that they approach out of faith and love towards Christ; whereas, on the contrary, we see those who communicate seldom, or once a year, communicate coldly and without relish, and more out of the custom of communicating once a year than out of a true affection of the heart and love towards Christ our Saviour, who alone can stir up in our breasts the spirit of devotion and compunction. And since our adversaries place the great strength of their disputation in this reason, as in a most secure citadel, I shall not be loath to explain this argument somewhat more fully, so that they themselves (if they will look with sound eyes) may see on how weak an argument and reason they rely, while with so hostile a mind they find fault with a thing that has never been praised and approved enough, according to its worth, by all the most learned and most religious men. And first we say that we do not approve, nay, that we most strongly condemn, mercenary priests, who celebrate without any devotion or reverence for so great a Sacrament, and only in hope of gain, to the disgrace of the priestly dignity; if the ecclesiastical canons were observed in their promotion, sufficient provision would be made against this evil. But I greatly wonder at the piety of these men, who on account of the fault of a priest condemn with such zeal a

thing worthy of all praise; and, because some approach this most sacred and venerable Sacrament unworthily, therefore declare its frequent use to be dangerous without distinction: as if, by the same reasoning, it could not be said against them that its use even once a year is to be disapproved, because many who are stained with the blots of sins, such as concubinaries, fornicators, usurers, or men bound by other vices, approach it impiously, namely lest they should seem less religious and less Christian, and not because they are led by piety and hatred of sins. But God forbid that we should condemn a thing so useful and fruitful because of the impiety of those who use it ill. Otherwise, would not these men by the same argument prove that the daily use of bread and wine is dangerous, because many abuse them, when they either become drunk or gorge themselves with feasting? Would not, by the same reasoning, theology and the other honourable disciplines be bad, since so many turn them to their own and others' bane and ruin? The vice of a few, therefore, which arises not from the thing itself but from their own depraved will, ought not to be brought forward as an argument for disapproving the frequent reception of the holy Eucharist; especially among pious and religious men, who approach it with great devotion and with no less fruit. But if, setting aside those few mercenary and abandoned men, we look to other priests, religious as well as secular, who does not see with how much fruit and devotion they frequently celebrate this mystery? And if, setting aside the priests, we will turn our eyes to the laity, and to religious and secular women, who does not look up to their devotion, piety and religion in approaching this venerable Sacrament? especially since their faces, bathed in most abundant tears, often bear witness to these very things? For by what other force would anyone be driven to a work so arduous and laborious, unless by religion and the love of Christ? And with how much fruit they approach, they know who receive. For this is that hidden manna,[16] and the white counter, in which is written a new name, which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it. Certainly from their life and conduct it is seen clearly enough how much they profit by its frequent reception. But if some approach this sacred mystery frequently out of habit or hypocrisy rather than out of devotion, and for that reason approach coldly and without devotion, we wish to warn our adversaries that such men are in no way approved or defended by us; men whom, in the second chapter, led by most weighty testimonies, we most constantly judged worthy of extreme damnation and liable to eternal punishments. But whether some approach with so depraved a mind is not easily to be judged, lest, while we judge others, we condemn ourselves. And if you still importunately object that it is unworthy that those who frequent this most worthy Sacrament should approach without reverence and devotion, we answer you: if they approach having proved themselves (for it is of such that we are speaking in the present disputation), they will certainly approach out of faith, and hope, and charity. And it cannot be that those who approach furnished with these virtues should not also approach with devotion and reverence, as the fruit of those virtues. This is the opinion of many Doctors, and especially of those who are called Contemplatives, to whom, in this matter, as men most skilled and most practised in their own art, the greatest credence ought rightly to be given.

[16] Apocalypse 2.

Chapter IV: Proofs for Confirming the Frequent Use of the Eucharist, Drawn Both from Sacred Scripture and from the Custom of the Church, Ancient from the Very Times of the Apostles, and from Authority

Now, since the objections and arguments of our adversaries seem to have been sufficiently answered, it remains that we proceed to set forth the very truth which we defend: namely, that the frequent reception of the most holy Eucharist, especially every week (which, as we have already said, is our purpose), is praiseworthy, useful and most fruitful, and highly approved and commended by all learned and Catholic men; nay, that it is beyond dispute not only useful, but more useful and fruitful than abstaining from it, other things being equal. This doctrine I hope, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the great consolation of those who frequently approach this sacred Synaxis and to the increase of their devotion, to prove so well that no evasion will be left to our adversaries. And this will be made most plain as much by the testimonies of the Scriptures as by the custom and doctrine of the Catholic Church, and by the common consent of almost all the holy Fathers, Greek as well as Latin, and by most firm and most valid reasons; many of which prove the frequent practice of communicating, not only once a week but even daily, especially in men withdrawn from the ordinary and common life and not much occupied in secular and profane business. We confess, however, that in introducing frequent Communion among the faithful peoples the very greatest account must be taken of times, places and persons, so that it may be introduced and received without scandal, quarrelling and contention, and with the greatest possible fruit and edification. We also affirm this: that in certain regions, where the custom of communicating does not flourish, it is better to defer the practice of frequent Communion than to bring it in with offence to the little ones; but only until, through preachers of the divine word or the practice of pious men, both superiors and subjects, well instructed concerning the truth and usefulness of this frequent reception, receive it with joy and spiritual consolation, and others are led and invited by the example of others to the salutary reception of this Sacrament. For since the unlearned people are slow to recognise divine gifts, they are wont to be moved more by the example of some whose heart the Lord has touched than to be driven by disputations and reasonings. Care must also be taken that those who abstain from such frequency be not reproved or provoked, but rather taught and instructed in the spirit of mildness. All these things (that we may not go through them one by one) we leave to the pious and prudent dispenser to recognise, consider and carry out.

Now the time demands that we proceed to the proof of the truth proposed. And since in the Old Testament this most worthy Sacrament was foreshadowed by the Holy Ghost in many ways, it will not be out of place to cite a few passages out of many which the sacred and Catholic Doctors have referred to it. From these we can prove how useful and fruitful its reception is. Hence David says: "I am smitten as grass, and my heart is withered: because I forgot to eat my bread";[1] that is, to receive the holy Eucharist. But if such wretched effects follow from forgetting and abstaining from it, it will be fitting that the best fruits should be gathered from its frequent use.

[1] Psalm 101.

The same David also says elsewhere: "That he may make the face cheerful with oil: and that bread may strengthen man's heart."[2] This also the sacred Doctors interpret as said of the Eucharist, of

which this is the singular effect; and hence it is evident how expedient it is to receive it frequently.

[2] Psalm 103.

Wisdom also cries out: "Come, eat bread, and drink the wine which I have mingled for you." Who, then, will be so inhuman and boorish as to refuse to go as often as possible to the banquet of Wisdom, who besides invites us so liberally, especially since he will bring back from it salutary nourishment and strength for the soul?

The manna also, which, as is evident from so many places[3] of Sacred Scripture, was a most perfect figure of this Sacrament,[4] shows that its frequent reception is useful and fruitful to us as long as we are on this pilgrimage. For what does divine Scripture (when it relates that Moses commanded the children of Israel that each should gather every day, the Sabbath excepted, as much manna as the food of one day required: "Gather it six days," he says, "but on the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord, therefore it shall not be found") — what, I say, does divine Scripture signify to us here, but that the true manna, namely the most holy body of Christ in the Eucharist, can be received every day except the Sabbath? That is, daily, while we journey as pilgrims away from the Lord through the desert of this laborious and sorrowful life, until that true Sabbath, when we shall see him no longer in a dark manner, nor under a foreign figure, but face to face, in his own form, as he is in the glory of the Father: if only, having left Egypt behind, we strive with all our strength through the desert of this world, whole and innocent, towards the true land of promise.

[3] Exodus 16.

[4] Psalm 77.

This too most strongly confirms the assertion which we defend: that in very many places of the Old Testament the most holy Eucharist is foreshadowed in bread, which is our daily food, as is gathered from the three places to be cited below, in which that manna, the chief figure of this Sacrament, is called bread. For we read in Exodus 16:[5] "Behold I will rain bread from heaven for you." And a little after: "The Lord shall give you flesh to eat in the evening, and in the morning bread to the full." And in Psalm[6] 77: "Man ate the bread of angels: he sent them provisions in abundance." And Wisdom 16: "Instead of which things thou didst feed thy people with the food of angels,[7] and gavest them bread from heaven prepared without labour." In many other places too bread is indicated to have been a figure of this Sacrament: as Isaias 30:[8] "The bread of the corn of the earth shall be most plentiful and fat." And Leviticus 23: "You shall offer a new sacrifice to the Lord out of all your dwellings, two loaves of the firstfruits, of two tenths of flour."[9] The same thing was signified also by the bread which Melchisedech,[10] the priest of the most high God, offered to the Lord when he blessed Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings; and also by that hearth cake in the strength of which Elias walked forty days and forty nights unto the mount of God, Horeb;[11] and finally by the loaves of proposition.[12] To what end, then, does bread foreshadow the most holy Eucharist in so many places? Is it not that, just as this common bread must be taken frequently by the sound and healthy if they wish to preserve their life, so we should understand that the Eucharist, the express truth of that bread, when frequently received by all who are well disposed and duly prepared, is useful and fruitful? If indeed the thing figured must correspond to the figure, since it can do so most aptly and most properly.

[5] Exodus 16.

[6] Psalm 77.

[7] Wisdom 16.

[8] Isaias 30.

[9] Leviticus 23.

[10] Genesis 14.

[11] 3 Kings 16.

[12] Exodus 40.

If, however, we come to the New Testament, and attend to our Lord speaking in John,[13] we shall surely understand how necessary to us is the frequent use of this Sacrament. For since we often die through sin, and are in need of life, we must often approach this bread, which is the true life, since the Lord himself says: "I am the bread of life." And: "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven; that if any man eat of it, he may not die." And afterwards: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever." And: "The bread that I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world." But who will be so arrogant as to deny that he often needs this bread? Who so foolish and senseless as to wish to remain in death when life is offered to him? And that you may understand that he is speaking of the use of this Sacrament, he adds: "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you." Then: "My flesh is meat indeed: and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, abideth in me, and I in him." Since, therefore, we very often need nourishment, and it is needful for us to have life in us and to abide in Christ, which comes about through the reception of this Sacrament, who will deny that its frequent use is most fruitful for us? But as for those who say that Christ the Lord in this sixth chapter is speaking not of sacramental but of spiritual eating, because, when many of the disciples, not fully instructed in the divine mysteries, on hearing those words had murmured and said, "This saying is hard, and who can hear it?", he answered, "It is the spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I have spoken to you, are spirit and life": to these we make no answer, but on the contrary, together with Chrysostom and Augustine and many other Fathers, we contend that Christ is here speaking of sacramental eating; and that he said, "It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing," and "The words that I have spoken to you, are spirit and life," because the disciples understood his words too carnally, believing that his flesh had to be eaten as the flesh of animals was eaten, which is ground by the teeth. Christ frees them from this error, teaching that what is said is not to be understood carnally, but rather spiritually: namely, that they must eat under the species of bread, as he himself afterwards instituted at the Last Supper; and when Christ's words are understood in this way, the eating is sacramental and not carnal.

[13] John 6.

The same is proved also from the words of Christ in Luke 22.[14] For after the Lord Jesus had consecrated and given his body to his disciples, he said to them: "Do this for a commemoration of me." With these words he exhorted them that, just as he had consecrated and given to them, so they also should do, consecrating and giving to others without any condition of time, and as often as it should seem expedient to them for the benefit and devotion of the peoples; which the Apostles themselves afterwards diligently did in their own times, as we shall show below. And if our Lord has

exhorted us to the frequent reception of his body, who will be so bold as to condemn those who frequently approach the table to which the Lord so liberally invites [us]?

[14] Luke 23.

To this also pertains that [petition] of the Lord's[15] Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread." This Augustine, writing to Proba, Cyprian, Ambrose and Jerome, and many other Fathers interpret as said of the holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. It is called daily because we need it daily, since we offend God daily; and the Lord teaches us to ask for this bread "this day," that is, daily. For so St Ambrose understands it, in book 5 of *De sacramentis*, ch. 4, where he says: "If you receive daily, every day is 'this day' for you." Hence it becomes plain that we can usefully and fruitfully receive daily what the Lord teaches us to ask for daily. And that this can quite fittingly be understood as said of this Sacrament of the Eucharist is shown by the fact that the bread which Luke here calls "daily," Matthew, in ch. 6,[16] calls "supersubstantial," if we look to the Latin words. But the Greek text in both Evangelists has τὸν ἐπιούσιον, which indeed means both "daily" and "supersubstantial." Here, moreover, it must especially be noticed that in both Evangelists the article TON is put before it, which according to Greek idiom very often carries emphasis, as it seems to here, and therefore signifies a certain most excellent bread.

[15] Luke 11.

[16] Matthew 6.

For what other supersubstantial and most excellent bread can be asked for, but Christ himself, to be received in the Sacrament, who is the living bread, of which whoever eats shall not die for ever? For that is its power and nature.

Paul also, in the first [Epistle] to the Corinthians, 11, says: "But let a man prove himself: and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of the chalice." In this place St Paul exhorts all that, having made this proof (of which we have already spoken), they should approach with confidence. How, then, will such an approach not be fruitful, however frequent, provided you approach having proved yourself?

The same Paul also, a little earlier, narrating the institution of this Sacrament, says that Christ, when he had consecrated this Sacrament and given it to his disciples, said to them: "This do for the commemoration of me." St Thomas, expounding that chapter, teaches that these words make for the frequent reception of this Sacrament. "And to show," he says, "the reason for frequenting this mystery, he adds: 'This do for the commemoration of me,' etc."

The same can be proved also from the custom of the infant Church, introduced and kept by the Apostles themselves. For there was then a received custom (which we believe flowed from the words of Christ) of communicating frequently, as is plainly gathered from Acts of the Apostles 2,[17] where, in the sermon which Peter preached on the day of Pentecost after the Holy Ghost had been received, we read: "They therefore that received his word were baptized; and there were added in that day about three thousand souls." And it follows: "And they were persevering in the doctrine of the Apostles, and in communication, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." Hence it can no longer be denied that in the time of the Apostles, in the very beginnings of the infant Church, holy Communion was frequented as useful and fruitful, since all, as many as were converted to the faith, persevered in communication and in the breaking of bread.

[17] Acts 2.

That this was also the custom of the primitive Church seems sufficiently established from the First [Epistle] of Paul to the Corinthians, 11,[18] where he says: "When you come together into one place, it is not now to eat the Lord's supper," etc. Hence it appears that there was a custom in the Church of Corinth of often coming together for Communion. Nor does Paul in that chapter (let no one be deceived) rebuke the Corinthians because they came together for Communion, but because they did not come together rightly. For they came together as if to everyday and profane banquets, where they drowned themselves in wine and gorged themselves with feasting, and put to shame the poor, who did not have even what was necessary for food. Hence he himself says: "To come together in this way is not now to eat the Lord's supper"; as if he said: "That you approach the Lord's supper, you are worthy of praise; but that you do not approach in the manner in which you ought, you are now worthy not of praise but of blame." And therefore he adds: "Do I praise you? In this I praise you not"; because when the Lord Jesus, on the night in which he was betrayed, made this Sacrament, he delivered it to his disciples so that, approaching proved and worthy, they might call to mind the memory of his passion, not so that in revellings and drunkenness they should put to shame those who have not.

[18] 1 Corinthians 11.

The Supreme Pontiff Anacletus declares that the Church thereafter kept this praiseworthy custom, once received; he (as is recorded in De consecratione, distinction 2, chapter Peracta) decreed in these words: "When the consecration has been completed, let all communicate who do not wish to be deprived of the thresholds of the Church. For so both the Apostles ordained, and the holy Roman Church holds." From which no Catholic will now be able to deny that this was the custom of both the Apostles and the holy Roman Church—nay more, that it was instituted and sanctioned, certainly, already from the times of Anacletus until the abrogation of that decree and edict of his. But the Apostles would never have ordained this, nor would the holy Roman Church have kept it, nor would the blessed Pontiff have decreed with such severity that Communion be received every day, unless it were more useful and more fruitful to communicate frequently than seldom. And if afterwards, as the devotion of the faithful grew cold, this edict was changed, that does not take away the fact that, if the faithful of Christ, out of the same devotion, wish to communicate often, they do much better than if they abstain out of fear; since the sole cause of changing that custom and the Pontiff's precept was the lessening of devotion, as the malice of men increased.

St Jerome too, in the Apology against Jovinian, testifies that this was the custom of the Roman Church in his times: "I know," he says, "that this is the custom at Rome, that the faithful always receive the body of Christ." And in the Epistle to Lucian he asserts that the custom of receiving the Eucharist daily is observed in the churches of the Romans and of Spain. And we believe that this custom also lasted for a long time. With how great usefulness and fruit, Mother Church shows, who testifies thus in a certain prayer concerning this Sacrament: "Having received the sacred gifts, we beseech thee, O Lord, that with the frequenting of the mystery the effect of our salvation may increase." Which the Church, which is governed by the Holy Ghost, would surely never sing, unless a great fruit truly accrued to us from the frequenting of the holy Eucharist.

We judge that from those times of the Apostles flowed, and has lasted down to this our age, that custom which the most ancient Church of Ethiopia, which is subject to the rule of Prester John, a most powerful king, holds and keeps, received with the greatest consent and with perpetual religious

observance. For there is a custom in it (as a certain [author] writes, and as we have heard from most weighty men) that whoever come together to hear the sacrifice of the Mass, all to a man always receive holy Communion. This fact ought to bring the deepest blush to our faces and to stir in us zeal of devotion toward this sacrament, since we find that nations most remote from these regions, where the true and genuine integrity of the most holy Gospel has always flourished, still keep even now this custom of communicating very often. And lest anyone wrongly think that among these peoples the sacrifice is seldom offered, so that it would be no wonder if those present always communicated at it, that same author, who was an eyewitness together with many companions from the Western Church and committed these things to writing, relates that among them it is an established custom that every day in each church or monastery only one Mass is celebrated, and all who come together to it receive the holy synaxis. Hence we understand that this practice of communicating frequently is most ancient, and has been kept in the Church of Ethiopia from the very time of the Apostles down to our age; and that in other churches it lasted for a long time, we consider that we have sufficiently proved from the testimonies of Anacletus and Jerome adduced above.

Add to these also that the Church has never forbidden frequent Communion; nay rather, it has decreed that it should not be forbidden, in De consecratione, distinction 2, where it is said: "Let not the dispenser forbid the fat ones of the earth to eat at the table of the Lord." Now if the dispenser ought not to forbid the fat ones of the earth to eat at the table of the Lord, much less ought those to whom that dispensing does not belong to forbid Christ's poor, who approach this holy table out of devotion—unless they wish deliberately to act against the just and holy prohibition of the Church.

Chapter V: Proofs Taken from the Holy Greek Fathers and Doctors

Since we have now said enough about the exceptional usefulness and the most abundant fruit that arises from the frequenting of holy Communion, and have shown how praiseworthy it is to approach it frequently by the testimony of holy Scripture, by the custom of the Apostles, by the institution of the infant Church, and by the consent of many peoples thereafter, we shall confirm the same by the authority and teaching of the holy Fathers, first the Greek, then the Latin, who with almost the same zeal and agreement approve, and most highly praise, the frequent use of this holy Synaxis, and exhort the faithful to it.

First, then, St Ignatius writes in the tenth Epistle, to the Ephesians: "Hasten therefore," he says, "to approach the Eucharist and the glory of God frequently. For when this very thing is done assiduously, the powers of Satan are driven out, who turns his acts into fiery darts unto sin."

Nor indeed does St Chrysostom, on the Epistle of Paul to Timothy, Homily 5, pass this matter over, rebuking those who think that merit consists in a longer interval of time, and consider it the highest reverence not to approach that heavenly table more often, since integrity of conscience alone makes the approach timely. I shall not be loath to repeat his words from a little further back, since he discusses the frequenting of this Sacrament with the greatest piety as well as with the greatest learning. For he says: "This indeed is what throws everything into confusion: that you think merit lies not in purity of soul but in a longer interval of time, and consider it the highest reverence and religion if you do not approach that heavenly table more often. Do you not know that to approach unworthily, even if it is done only once, will deliver you to punishment, but that if you approach worthily, even often, you will gain salvation from it? It is not boldness to approach the Lord's table more often, but to approach unworthily, even if someone approaches only once in the whole time of his life. But we are so dull, so senseless, that though we commit countless crimes through the whole year, we take no care to put them off, but think it enough if we do not presume to touch the body of Christ assiduously and insultingly; nor do we understand, wretches that we are, that those who fastened Christ to the cross did it only once: is the offence therefore less because they crucified him once? And he who betrayed Christ betrayed him only once: did that therefore rescue him from punishment? Why then do we measure this matter by the rule of time? Let purity of conscience make the timely time for approaching. The mystery that is consummated at the Pasch has nothing more than that which is continually celebrated. For it is one and the same; the grace of the Holy Ghost is the same; it is always the Pasch. You who are initiated surely know what we are saying: whether on Friday, or on the Sabbath, or on the Lord's day, or on a feast of martyrs, the same victim is offered, the same sacrifice is consummated. 'For as often' (he says) 'as you shall eat this bread and drink the chalice, you shall show the death of the Lord.' He willed to circumscribe the Sacrifice by no observance of time." So far St Chrysostom; from which it is sufficiently understood how salutary and free from danger it is to approach Communion often, provided you approach proved by purity of conscience.

The same Chrysostom, on [chapter] 11 of the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, Homily 28, rebuking those who kept to the solemn feasts for approaching this sacrament more in order to follow the custom of others than because they were of sound conscience, affirms that it is always a

solemnity and a time for approaching if purity of soul is present, and that one who is compunct and prepared ought not to be hindered from Communion because it is not a solemnity. His words are these: "'But let a man prove himself.' Not as we do now, approaching rather on account of the season than from earnestness of soul; nor do we approach as men prepared, full of compunction, to purge away our vices, but we consider how we may be at the solemnities, when all are present. But Paul did not so command; rather he knows one time both for coming together and for receiving Communion: purity of conscience itself.[1] And so [he would have us] touch that pure sacrifice, not be sluggishly disposed and wretchedly compelled to approach because of a solemnity; nor again [would he have] one who is compunct and prepared be hindered because it is not a solemnity. For a solemnity is the showing forth of good works, purity of soul, the certainty of life; if you have these, you will always be able to keep a solemnity, always to approach." What could be clearer to show that we can always celebrate and communicate, if purity of soul is present?

[1] So it reads in the Greek.

The same Chrysostom asserts the same thing in the Oration on St Philogonius: "But now," he says, "many Christians have come to such madness and such contempt that, though they swarm with innumerable evils, they nevertheless have no care for their life, but on feast days approach the table carelessly and rashly, not understanding that the time of Communion is not a feast or a celebration, but a pure conscience and a life cleansed of sins. For just as he who is conscious to himself of no evil ought to approach every day, so for him who is taken up with sins and does not repent, it is not safe to approach even on feasts. For to approach once a year does not free us from sins, if we have approached unworthily; nay, this very thing increases our condemnation, that although we approach only once, not even then do we approach purely." Do you see, then, that according to the opinion of this most learned Father it is lawful for you to approach the Eucharist daily, provided you approach with a clean conscience?

Theophylact (or rather, it may be, Athanasius), on that [saying] of Paul in the First [Epistle] to the Corinthians, 11, "But let a man prove himself," writes thus: "I would set before you no judge but yourself. You therefore, having examined and sifted your conscience, approach those mysteries not on feast days nor on ordinary days, but at any time whatever, when you find yourself pure and worthy." What could be said more clearly for our opinion?

Chapter VI: Proofs Taken from the Holy Latin Fathers, Both the Ancient Doctors and the More Recent Scholastics

But now to come to the Latins: St Cyprian, first of all, on the Lord's Prayer, Sermon 6, says: "Now we ask that this bread be given us daily, lest we who are in Christ, and daily receive the Eucharist for the food of salvation, should, by the intervention of some graver sin, while we are held back and, not communicating, are kept from the heavenly Bread, be separated from the body of Christ, as he himself says and warns: 'I am the bread of life which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever.' Since then he says that if anyone eats of the bread he lives for ever, as it is manifest that they live who touch his body and receive the Eucharist by the right of communion, so on the other hand we must fear, and pray, lest, while anyone being held back is separated from the body of Christ, he remain far from salvation, as he himself threatens and says: 'Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you.' And therefore we ask that our bread, that is, Christ, be given us daily, so that we who abide and live in Christ may not withdraw from his sanctification and body." By these words, as you see, St Cyprian commends to us the frequent receiving of the Eucharist, and shows how much benefit arises from its daily use, and how much danger is to be feared from abstaining. And in the sermon on the Lord's Supper the same Doctor speaks wonderfully and divinely of the worthy receiving of this Sacrament: a discourse truly worthy to be always at hand for all who are truly zealous for the Christian name.

St Hilary too, as is read in De consecratione, distinction 2, speaks thus: "If the sins are not so great that one is excommunicated, he ought not to separate himself from the medicine of the body and blood of the Lord; wherefore it is to be feared lest, being long withdrawn from the body of Christ, he remain a stranger to salvation. Let him who has ceased to sin not cease to communicate."

Moreover St Ambrose, book 5 De sacramentis, ch. 4, on the Lord's Prayer, speaks thus: "If the bread is daily, why do you receive it after a year, as the Greeks in the East are accustomed to do? Receive daily what may profit you daily; so live that you may deserve to receive daily. He who does not deserve to receive daily does not deserve to receive after a year." And a little after: "He who has a wound seeks a medicine. The wound is that we are under sin; the medicine is the heavenly and venerable Sacrament. 'Give us this day our daily bread': if you receive daily, daily it is 'today' for you." These words, nay the whole sermon, are found in Augustine, On the Words of the Lord, Sermon 28, as anyone may see.

The same Ambrose, book 4 De sacramentis, ch. 6 (and it is found in De consecratione, distinction 2), says: "If, as often as the blood of Christ is shed, it is shed for the remission of sins, I ought always to receive it, that my sins may be forgiven me; I who always sin ought always to have the medicine."

And elsewhere the same Ambrose: "It is a grave thing," he says, "that we do not come to thy table with a clean heart and innocent hands; but it is graver if, because we fear our sins, we do not render the sacrifice." And this tells most strongly against the adversaries, who, out of some fear or other of irreverence, keep the faithful of Christ, who are otherwise proved and worthy, from the frequent use of this holy mystery.

St Jerome too writes thus to Lucinius: "Concerning the Eucharist to be received daily, which the churches of Rome and of Spain are said to observe, Hippolytus, a most eloquent man, has indeed written, and various writers have published [extracts] piecemeal from different authors; but I think I should briefly admonish you of this: that the traditions of the Church, especially those that do no harm to the faith, are to be observed as they have been handed down by our forefathers, and that the custom of some is not to be overturned by the contrary practice of others. And would that we could always receive the Eucharist without condemnation of ourselves and without a stinging conscience, and hear the Psalmist saying: 'Taste, and see how sweet the Lord is.'" From which it is clear that in the times of St Jerome the frequent use of Communion had prevailed not only at Rome but, as we said above, in Spain too; and concerning daily Communion, he asserts, not only Hippolytus but other writers too published books. There one may also see how devoutly he desires that we might all always receive the Eucharist without condemnation of ourselves: which indeed he will do who, with a proved conscience, approaches Communion worthily.

The same Jerome also, on the Epistle to the Galatians, 4, says: "Therefore, just as it is lawful for us either to fast always or to pray always, and, rejoicing, to celebrate the Lord's day unceasingly by receiving the Lord's body, it is not so lawful for the Jews to sacrifice the Lamb." From these words of St Jerome it is clear that it is lawful for us to celebrate the Lord's day continually by receiving holy Communion, which the adversaries nevertheless deny.

The same Jerome, in the Rule to Eustochium, ch. 19, counsels nuns to confess and communicate twice or more often in the month. "Let each of them," he says, "confess their hidden sins twice or more each month, and, fortified by the holy Communion of the Lord's body, enter the camp of the demons to fight manfully." From the words of Jerome set down above it is made sufficiently plain that he was of the opinion that he judged it holy and fruitful to communicate every Sunday, or twice in the month; since he both approves and recommends it, and he never said it was wrong or dangerous to communicate daily, even though in the Apology against Jovinian he says that he neither blames nor approves it. To which we have replied where the authority of Augustine, or of Alcuin, was being treated.

St Augustine too, as is found in De consecratione, distinction 2, chapter Utrum sub figura etc., speaks thus: "Now this offering is repeated daily, although Christ suffered once, because daily we commit sins without which mortal weakness cannot live."

And in the Tractate on the Gospel of John, 26, he says: "Bring innocence back to the altar. As for sins, even if they be daily, at least let them not be deadly. Before you approach the altar, consider what you say: 'Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive,' etc. Do you forgive? It will be forgiven you. Approach without anxiety: it is bread, not poison."

The same Augustine also, in Epistle 118, to Januarius, answering the dispute of certain men, when some denied that the Eucharist ought to be received daily and others affirmed that it ought to be received daily, speaks thus: "Perhaps he settles the dispute between them more rightly who advises that above all they remain in the peace of Christ; and let each one do what, according to his faith, he piously believes ought to be done." Now if Augustine advises that they remain in the peace of Christ, and that in the frequenting of the Eucharist, even daily, each one do what, according to his faith, he piously believes ought to be done, who are these men so severe that they dare to blame those whom the holy man advises to act according to their faith? In these places St Augustine either recommends

or permits the daily receiving of the Eucharist, and nowhere blames it; whereas we, in our assertion, lay down nothing else than this: that to communicate every week is much more praiseworthy and more fruitful than to abstain.

The opinion of Augustine himself, as many assert, in On the Words of the Lord, Sermon 28, is also plain enough in favour of the frequenting of Communion; we do not, however, adduce it here, because that whole sermon seems to be attributed to Augustine himself, whereas the whole of it is found in Ambrose, book 5 De sacramentis, ch. 4, as we said above.

The same Augustine also approves this assertion of ours in On Ecclesiastical Dogmas, ch. 53 (or perhaps that book was Alcuin's, as certain learned men affirm), when he says: "To receive the communion of the Eucharist daily I neither praise nor blame; but I recommend and exhort that one communicate on all Sundays, provided that the mind be without attachment to sin." And a little after he again exhorts that one, having professed the pursuit of religion, should through amendment of life also do the contrary of those things of which he repents, and should receive the Eucharist on all Sundays, as a suppliant and humbly, until death. Do you see now how piously this author recommends and exhorts all to receive the Eucharist every Sunday? And if we wish to speak of daily receiving, surely you are too peevish, not to say impious, who blame those whom Augustine does not dare [to blame].

St Gregory too hints at the same thing, as is found in De consecratione, distinction 2, chapter Quid sit sanguis, where he says: "For the Lord, providing for us, gave us this Sacrament of salvation, so that, because we sin daily and he can no longer die, we may obtain remission of sins through that Sacrament. For daily he is eaten and drunk in truth, yet he remains whole, and living, and immaculate."

And Gregory VII, in the first book of the Register, Epistle 31, to Matilda, speaks thus: "Among the other weapons against the prince of this world which, by God's favour, I have given you, I pointed out that which is the most powerful, that you should receive the Lord's body frequently; and I enjoined you to commit yourself entirely to the sure trust of the Mother of the Lord." This book, though it has not been printed, nevertheless deserves to be read, both for the excellence of its teaching and for the holiness of the man.

St Bernard too says this: "He who has a wound seeks a remedy. We have a wound while we are under sin; the remedy is the Sacrament. Receive it daily, and daily you will be healed." Do you see what counsel Bernard, that most prudent physician of our souls, gives?

And in the Sermon on the Lord's Supper he says: "What are you doing, ungrateful man? Adore more devoutly, and call to mind more frequently, in the Sacrament of the altar, the salvation of the world that suffered for you, the life that died for you, the strength that was made weak." And in the same sermon: "The friends of the Bridegroom, that is, good bishops, good abbots, and the other God-fearing and religious men, have tasted and most fully experienced what we have said; and therefore they come more frequently to the table of the altar, at all times making their garments white, that is, their bodies, as best they can, inasmuch as they are about to handle their God with hand and mouth, and to hear Him speaking with them."

Blessed Innocent also, the Supreme Pontiff, warns that care must be taken lest, if the receiving of this sacrament be put off too long, one fall into danger of death. Observe, then, how dangerous it is to

approach so great a Sacrament rarely.

And therefore Blessed Apollonius (as we read in the Lives of the Fathers, in his life) used to admonish that, if it could be done, the monks should communicate daily, lest anyone who shrank from the Sacrament should be estranged from God. He also took care that the brethren who were with him should not take food before they had received the Lord's communion.

But with what disadvantages he is afflicted who abstains from the celebration of this most holy Sacrament, when he could approach laudably and without sin, the most learned and Venerable Bede expresses most beautifully in a certain treatise, writing thus: "A priest who, not being lawfully hindered, omits to celebrate, deprives, as far as in him lies, the Holy Trinity of praise and glory, the angels of joy, sinners of pardon, the just of help and grace, those who are in purgatory of refreshment, the Church of the spiritual benefit of Christ, and himself of medicine and remedy." Of the last of these are deprived also those who, though they could approach worthily, nevertheless will not.

If I wished to bring forward the opinions of the Scholastics and of the weightiest Doctors, I should show that there is no one (so far as I have seen) who, speaking simply, does not strongly approve the frequenting of the holy Eucharist, not only every week but even daily, provided that one approaches duly proved.

But to consult brevity, I will bring forward in witness of our assertion a few out of many, though the weightier ones; and first of all St Thomas, who in the third part, question 80, article 10, teaches that, the Sacrament being considered as much on its own side as on the side of the one receiving, it is praiseworthy to receive it daily, if one finds oneself prepared. And on [book] 4, distinction 12, in the reply to the third and last [question], he says that, speaking simply, it is better to receive than to abstain. And on that [text] of the first [Epistle] to the Corinthians, 11, "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily," etc., after a long discussion he speaks thus: "Since, however, love is preferred to fear, it seems, speaking of the thing in itself, more commendable that one should receive more frequently than more seldom."

Richard is of the same opinion, giving the same reply as St Thomas.

St Bonaventure, on [book] 4, distinction 12, says: "If anyone were always prepared, it would always be profitable to receive this Sacrament, so that, having a clean receptacle, he might eat this food with honour, devotion, and manifold fruit. Hence it was fitting for the faithful of the primitive Church to receive every day, inasmuch as they were saints. But afterwards, as charity grew cold, divers times of communicating were instituted."

And in the treatise On the Progress of Religious, book 2, the next-to-last chapter, he writes thus: "It is nevertheless wholesome and profitable that a man should often prepare himself for receiving that medicine, and should strive to receive it as devoutly as he can, and after receiving should keep himself in zeal." And a little after: "And although sometimes tepidly, yet, trusting in the mercy of God, let him approach with confidence. If he thinks himself unworthy, let him consider that so much the more is he in need, and must seek the physician, the more he feels himself to be sick. For they that are in health need not a physician, but they that are ill. Nor do you seek to join yourself to Christ in order that you may sanctify Him, but that you may be sanctified by Him. Nor is holy communion to be passed over on this account, if sometimes a man does not feel the special grace of devotion when he strives to prepare himself for it, or if in the very receiving, or afterwards, he perhaps feels

himself less devout than he would wish." Do you see how a man most religious, and most practised in spiritual things, both confirms our assertion and approves the frequenting of the most holy Eucharist?

Blessed Denis the Carthusian also, on [book] 4, distinction 12, says that, other things being equal, it is much better to approach out of charity and zeal for the common good than to hold back out of humility and fear; especially since this Sacrament is the Sacrament of all charity, liberality, and grace, and the medicine of the soul; and he adds many other things of this kind. And in the treatise which he composed On the Frequenting of Communion he writes much about its constant use.

John Gerson also, in Treatise 9 on the Magnificat, says that, considering the effects of this most holy Sacrament, it is more praiseworthy to approach more often out of love for it and confidence in the mercy of God, than, out of fear or scruples, to make oneself for a long time in a manner excommunicated from the same sacrament; and that he who has no certainty of a lawful impediment should not expose himself to danger. And after a little he adds: "But foolish is the fear, and less than prudent the reverence, of him who does not approach the Lord when He calls and invites him."

Adrian, the Supreme Pontiff and a learned man, writes on [book] 4, on the sacrament of the Eucharist, that, preparation having been made according to the strength of human frailty, it is better to receive this Sacrament than to abstain; and he proves this convincingly.

Durandus, on [book] 4, distinction 12, asserts the same, teaching that it is more praiseworthy to receive the Eucharist than to abstain, as much from the kind of act as on the side of the effect, and also from the habits inclining to receiving and to abstaining; which he clearly shows. Countless others, and those most weighty Doctors, who assert the same, I pass over for the sake of brevity. For almost all the Summists and other Scholastics agree with the greatest consensus in the same or a similar opinion.

Chapter VII: Reasons Drawn from the Cause, from the Effect, and Also from Experience

Although the testimonies brought forward above ought to be enough for seeing the truth, which is in any case clear enough of itself, nevertheless we shall endeavour to prove the same opinion by the firmest reasons, so that no room for evasion may be left to our adversaries, unless they prefer to hold more obstinately to an opinion once conceived than to yield to the truth now known and perceived.

Let this, then, be the first reason: this Sacrament is the spiritual food of the soul, as is found in John 6: "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, you shall not have life in you." And afterwards: "My flesh is meat indeed." Therefore, just as our body needs frequent food, that the radical moisture may be restored (otherwise death would follow), so also for the preservation of the spiritual life we need frequent reception of this Sacrament. For since, from the concupiscence born in us and from occupation in exterior things, there would come about a loss of the devotion through which man would return to God, assuredly, unless a restoration were made through this Sacrament frequently received, it would be to be feared that the soul would be altogether estranged from God and would die spiritually. Hence Innocent warns that care must be taken lest, if the receiving of this sacrament be put off too long, one fall into danger of death. From which it is clear enough that frequent reception of the Eucharist is more profitable and more fruitful than abstaining from it.

Second

This sacrament is the sacrament of unity, as St Thomas says on John, because, namely, through it man is in the highest degree united to God by love and devotion; and on [book] 4 he says that by virtue of this sacrament a certain transformation of man into Christ takes place through the union of love. The more frequently, therefore, it is received, the more is man united to God.

Third

That act is more perfect and more praiseworthy which flows from a more perfect and nobler virtue. But charity is much more perfect and nobler than fear. Since, therefore, frequent approach to the Eucharist proceeds from charity and the love of Christ, but abstaining from fear, it follows that it is more praiseworthy and more perfect to approach than to abstain.

Fourth

The use of this Sacrament springs from more numerous and nobler virtues: from religion and the love of Christ; from gratitude, by which we are made beholden to Him for the immense benefits conferred on us through His Passion; from confidence in His goodness; and from devotion. Nor are humility and reverence lacking in the reception of so great a Sacrament, while we behold and perceive in it the excellence and supreme goodness of Christ, and consider and acknowledge our own unworthiness and need. But he who abstains, even if he abstains out of humility and reverence for the sacrament, is nevertheless not moved by love, which is the noblest virtue, nor by that most sweet confidence in Christ which the Lord Himself so very often commended to us with such earnestness, when He said to the paralytic,[1] "Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee"; and to the disciples: "Have a good heart, for it is I";[2] and: "Have confidence, I have overcome the world."[3] From which it becomes plain that what we affirm is true.

[1] Matthew 9.

[2] Mark 6.

[3] John 16.

Fifth

This sacrament is set before us by Christ to be received in memory of His Passion, in these words: "Do this for a commemoration of me." Therefore he who refuses to approach when he could do so laudably, neglecting thus to recall to memory the benefit of the Passion of Christ, which is chiefly celebrated in the use of this sacrament, can surely be thought ungrateful. For just as, in the opinion of the Doctors, God is honoured in nothing more than in the celebration of the Lord's Passion, so in no way can we pay God greater honour than by the worthy reception of this Sacrament, in which the memory of His Passion is celebrated; nor can we in anything else better acknowledge God's benefits and show ourselves grateful than in the use of it. Hence it is said in the Psalms: "What shall I render to the Lord, for all the things that he hath rendered to me?[4] I will take the chalice of salvation."

[4] Psalm 115.

Sixth

Good in itself is more excellent than good by accident. But the receiving of this sacrament is good in itself, whereas abstaining is not good except by accident, because [it is good] only from the condition of the one who abstains, inasmuch as there is fear lest it be received less duly. Therefore it is more excellent, etc.

Seventh

The praise of frequenting the Eucharist is also best drawn from the manifold effect which its reception marvellously works. For it takes away mortal sin past, present, and future. Not that one who is in mortal sin of which he is conscious obtains the remission of it; but it is said to take away past sin in this sense, that the remains of guilt and the dispositions to sins are taken away by it, such as the proneness to relapse, and the vicious habits left over from sins. It also takes away present sin, namely that which we have forgotten, or of which we have neither consciousness nor attachment; and also sin that displeases us through attrition. For since slight sorrow, which by the Scholastics is called attrition, is not sufficient for the remission of mortal sin, this Sacrament together with attrition becomes a powerful cause [of remission], as St Thomas and other Doctors hold. It also takes away future mortal sin, inasmuch as it gives strength to avoid mortal sins thereafter. And that it produces these effects, besides the consensus of the Doctors who assert it, seems also to be gathered from the Lord's Prayer; where, after we have asked for that supersubstantial Bread, we ask that our debts be forgiven us, and that we be not led into temptation, but be delivered from evil, as being effects of the worthy reception of the most holy Eucharist; none of which does abstaining from it produce.

Eighth

The Eucharist also avails for blotting out venial sins, as the Master of the Sentences says, on [book] 4, distinction 12, bringing forward Ambrose, who says: "If, as often as the blood of Christ is shed, it is shed for the remission of sins, I ought always to receive it; I who always sin ought always to have the medicine." And [bringing him forward] in the book On the Sacraments affirming that this daily food is taken against daily infirmity; and daily infirmities are venial sins. St Augustine also says: "This

oblation is repeated daily, although Christ suffered once, because we sin daily with sins without which mortal infirmity cannot live"; and these are venial sins. Innocent also, speaking of this sacrament, says: "It blots out venial sins and guards against mortal sins"; but abstaining does none of these things.

Ninth

In the reception of this Sacrament the punishment due to sins is remitted, either wholly or in part, at least by reason of the disposition of the one who receives, on account of the devotion and fervour of charity, which avails not only for the remission of guilt but also of punishment, as Alexander says, part 4, question 41.

Tenth

Although equal good should befall him who receives this Sacrament and him who abstains, from the good movement of each, yet he who has received obtains a certain extraordinary good of which he who abstains is defrauded: namely, a most abundant grace, which is conferred on anyone well prepared through the use of the Sacrament itself. For the sacraments of the New Law, besides the grace which is wont to be given by God *ex opere operantis*, confer grace also *ex opere operato* (to speak after the manner of the Scholastics). By this term the Doctors signify that God attends with a certain special favour those who approach the sacraments duly, and adorns the very use of the sacraments with a singular privilege. For whereas God, according to the most sweet order of His wisdom, is wont to impart grace to those who do not use the sacraments according to the disposition and movement of the free will, which obeys the help of grace by which it is anticipated and turns itself to God, those who receive these sacraments well and duly He attends with greater grace than their very disposition, and conversion to God, and devotion merit. And this indeed He does for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, on account of His most illustrious and singular merits, and at the same time on account of the covenant made and confirmed with those who receive these sacraments, most kindly and most liberally. Wherefore he who, by the help of divine prevenient grace, is so prepared that by his conversion to God he would obtain some grace even without the sacraments, when the right use of the sacraments themselves is added, obtains not only that [grace] but a richer and more abundant one. And if this is true in all the sacraments of the New Law, assuredly in the Eucharist, which is the most worthy sacrament, it will be found far more true. And this its very name shows, since "Eucharist", a Greek word, signifies "good grace" among the Latins. Wherefore he who receives it worthily always obtains grace, or an increase of grace, on account of the very reception of the sacrament, which he who abstains by no means obtains. So even this one thing alone proves that what we say is true: that it is much better and more fruitful to receive the Eucharist frequently than to abstain from it.

Eleventh

If we also consider this most holy Sacrament as it is a sacrifice, it produces certain wonderful effects not only for those who receive it but also in those for whom it is offered. For to the living it obtains grace dispositively, and the remission of sins, not as a proximate cause, but inasmuch as it obtains the grace of contrition, by which sins are remitted and sanctifying grace is conferred. It also obtains the remission of punishment, either wholly or at least in part; for inasmuch as it is a sacrifice, it takes on the character of satisfaction. It obtains also peace and health and many other goods, as is clear

from the sacred [rites] instituted by the Church for this end. To the dead, moreover, it is of profit in so far as it frees them from the pains of purgatory by way of suffrage, as the Catholic Church believes, maintains, and teaches. It gladdens the blessed also: for they rejoice with an accidental joy over the honour which is shown to God in the celebration of this Sacrament. They rejoice also over the honour which is paid to them for the sake of God in this Sacrament, when it is offered to God in their honour. They rejoice besides over the benefits which Mother Church receives in her children, both living and dead, from the celebration of this sacrifice. Hence the Venerable Bede (as we brought forward above) writes: "A priest who, not being lawfully hindered, omits to celebrate, deprives, as far as in him lies, the Holy Trinity of praise and glory, the angels of joy, sinners of pardon, the just of help and grace, those who are in purgatory of refreshment, the Church of the spiritual benefit of Christ, and himself of medicine and remedy."

Twelfth

If we look also to the most sweet fruits which spring from the worthy reception of this Sacrament, who will there be in whom there is even a faint spark of the spirit of Jesus Christ, who does not desire to be refreshed by it not only frequently but most frequently? For the holy Doctors relate that from the worthy reception of it there come into the faithful soul twelve fruits like the twelve fruits of the tree of life, of which it is written in the last [chapter] of the Apocalypse, where we read: "And he shewed me a river of living water, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the midst of the street thereof: and on both sides of the river the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree for the healing of the nations." Of these fruits Richard writes on [book] 4, distinction, from which you can gather them if you wish. Other Doctors, however, enumerate those twelve fruits flowing from this sacrament thus: to quicken, to release, to inflame, to give patience, to nourish, to restore, to unite, to impart, to heal, to preserve, to strengthen, to bring through; and religious and learned men follow out these fruits most copiously in explaining them. St Bernard also reckons up the fruits of the Eucharist more briefly when he says: "The Eucharist is medicine to the sick, provision for pilgrims; it strengthens the weak, delights the strong, heals languor, preserves health. Man becomes meeker under correction, more patient in labour, more ardent in love, more shrewd in caution, readier to obey, more devout in giving thanks." Of all these fruits he defrauds himself who abstains from communion.

Thirteenth

He who approaches the Eucharist frequently examines his conscience frequently; and having examined it, he bewails and detests his sins, and lays upon himself a law of innocence for the future. From these acts great merit accrues, of which he who abstains is deprived, even though he be in grace. Who, then, will dare to say that it is more profitable to abstain from communion than to approach frequently, unless he who would contend that it is better to sit still on the way of the Lord than to go forward?

Fourteenth

He who approaches communion frequently approaches confession frequently; and he who confesses frequently guards his soul better and more easily, and keeps his heart free and whole from every stain of sin, both on account of a holy shame, namely lest he should have to confess the same sins too often, and on account of the strength and power which are received from frequent confession and

communion; and indeed on account of the diligent effort and care which those who confess frequently employ, so as to remain continually in the state of grace. But none of these things comes about through abstaining from communion.

Fifteenth

If the wise testify that those experienced in a mechanical art are to be believed, how much greater credence is to be given to those practised and skilled in the spiritual pursuit? And if you ask those who communicate frequently, they will answer that from the frequent reception of this Sacrament they feel wonderful effects: a more ardent charity towards God and their neighbour, a more vehement zeal for the observance of the divine commandments, a greater contempt of earthly things, firmer strength against the assaults of the devil, the world, and the flesh. They will confess, moreover, that they have been freed from many vices and defects in which they were caught and entangled before they frequented this mystery. Nor (as I think) will those who abstain say that they experience such effects from their abstaining.

Sixteenth

Those who abstain from communion (as they themselves say) abstain for this reason, that afterwards, more devoutly and more reverently, they may approach.

But how do you know that by abstaining you will obtain that devotion and reverence which you could not find in frequenting [the Sacrament]? For such devotion and reverence is very often conferred by God from the reception itself, or in the reception itself; and it very often happens that the more someone abstains from Communion, the colder and more undevout he is made. But an excessive fear of irreverence is foolish, for it does not believe the Lord when he invites. Hence John Gerson on the Magnificat: "Foolish," he says, "is the fear, and less than prudent the reverence, of him who does not approach the Lord who calls and invites him, but procrastinates." Hence that [saying] often comes true: "He who is not [fit] today will be less fit tomorrow." He says moreover that those who are unwilling to approach the Eucharist unless they are actually devout and fervent are like cold men who are unwilling to approach the fire unless they are first warm, and like sick men who are unwilling to go to the physicians unless they are first healthy; and to these, by divine justice, there very often happens what befell Adam, who, when he was in Paradise, was unwilling to eat of the tree of life, and when he was willing, could not.

Seventeenth

An excellent good which comes about more frequently and more surely is not to be given up for one that is uncertain and comes about rarely. Therefore, although it sometimes happens that he who approaches Communion more rarely approaches more devoutly and reverently, nevertheless (as the same Gerson says) the contrary often happens: namely, that he approaches much more undevoutly and coldly. For habit (as the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 2) makes one act with delight; and this he lacks who approaches rarely. Hence the same [author] adds: "Are you distracted today? Are you little devout? Little recollected? Much tempted by the flesh, the world, and the devil? I believe it indeed; but you should recognise that those who pursue you do not sleep: tomorrow the same enemies will be opposing you and lying in wait for your devotion as they are today." And he goes on: "You will say, I am cold, or lukewarm." He answers: "Often the beginning of the celebration has received a man little devout and cold, whom at the end it sends away warm and fervent: the body of Christ is a

spiritual fire: approach this fire, and you will grow warm more easily." From this it appears how foolishly they act who abstain for a long time in order to approach more devoutly.

Eighteenth

He who fears to approach the Eucharist either abstains because, trusting in his own industry, he hopes that at another time he will be better fitted; or abstains because he is waiting for a greater grace of God to prepare him. If the former, the persuasion and opinion is foolish; for in the whole time of his life no one can by his own industry make himself worthy of so great a mystery, since this is given to us by divine gift and not by our industry. But if this thought settles more deeply in our mind, we shall surely understand our neediness, and so we shall be humbled before God. And it is humility, above all, that disposes us to the worthy reception of so great a Sacrament. If the latter, the expectation is senseless, since the Lord is always at hand for us, conferring his grace once the impediment is removed. "For the Lord is nigh unto them that call upon him."[5] "Nor does the grace of the Holy Spirit know slow efforts," as Ambrose says. You see, then, how useless and how foolish is this abstinence of yours from so saving a Bread.

[5] Psalm 144.

Nineteenth

Although the Sacrament of the Eucharist was designated by innumerable figures in the old law, it was nevertheless expressed chiefly in Exodus 16, in the manna given to the fathers in the wilderness, which was gathered every day, except the Sabbath, as their daily food. In order, then, that the thing figured may answer to the figure, it is lawful and fitting to receive the most holy body of Christ daily until the true Sabbath, that is, until the day of glorious rest, in which we shall see him face to face, as he is in his glory.

Twentieth

Those who abstain from Communion on account of a vain fear of irreverence are very far from Christian liberty, which is wholly full of confidence in Christ and in his promises; and such men become excessively scrupulous and dejected in regard to zealous actions, cold in charity, lukewarm in prayer. On the contrary, those who communicate frequently are full of evangelical confidence, rejoicing in Christian liberty, strong and keen in action, and ardent and fervent in prayer. For in the whole pursuit of the Christian life you will scarcely find anything that raises the mind more to the knowledge of the omnipotence and of the other virtues that are in God than the consideration and contemplation of this Sacrament. And you will find nothing that confers more abundant grace for living well and zealously, and for advancing in the way of the Lord, than the frequent reception of the holy Eucharist.

Twenty-first

Finally, since the only-begotten Son of God, in his supreme liberality, willed to assume human nature in the unity of the divine suppositum, and to give himself, God and man, in the Sacrament, saying, "Take ye, and eat: This is my body,"[6] I truly cannot conceive by what reasoning we could escape the charge either of ingratitude or of inhumanity, if, spurning such great munificence of the Redeemer, we should reject, on account of some vain fear, so splendid and singular a gift so liberally offered to us; or if we should shut out so great a prince and lord, coming to us of his own accord and desiring to

lodge in our house, and should neglect to go out to meet him, but allow him to turn aside to others, having found I know not what excuse of irreverence; when he desires nothing in us so much as a contrite and humbled heart, and a simple and sincere poverty.

[6] Matthew 26.

THE END.

Exhortation to Holy Communion

I think, pious Reader, that you now understand well enough how much more splendid, how much more useful and fruitful it is to receive the most sacred body of Christ in the Eucharist frequently than to abstain from so saving and life-giving a food. This one thing only remains for you: that, having perceived the kindness of so great a King, who most liberally calls you to his marriage feast and invites you thus: "Take ye, and eat: this is my body,"[1] and, "Do this for a commemoration of me,"[2] you should approach promptly and frequently, lest you fall into the vice of ingratitude and be shut out of the kingdom of heaven with those invited guests of the Gospel (if you excuse yourself).[3] This is the marriage feast of the King of heaven; it is a spiritual banquet, whose bread strengthens the heart of man, and whose wine inebriates the mind of man with spiritual gladness.[4] And its food is the flesh of Christ, who says: "My flesh is meat indeed."[5] For this is that saving food of Angels given from heaven, "having in it all that is delicious, and the sweetness of every taste."[6] This is the fat bread which "shall yield dainties to kings."[7] This is "the bread of the corn of the earth, most plentiful and fat." This is also that bread of the first-fruits. This is the bread signified both in the hearth-cakes offered by Abraham to the Angels and in the loaves of proposition. This most wholesome bread was also designated in the bread and wine offered by Melchisedech.[8] This, finally, is that hearth-cake bread in the strength of which Elias walked forty days and forty nights unto the mount of God, Horeb.[9] This is the tree of life, planted by God, Best and Greatest, in the midst of the earthly paradise, the eating of which preserved bodily life.[10] This is the Paschal lamb without blemish, by whose blood, put upon both the door-posts and on the thresholds of the houses, the people of Israel were once preserved from the striking angel.[11] This is the kid which Manue offered to the Lord upon the rock.[12] It is also the honeycomb which Jonathan, having dipped the tip of his rod [in it], put to his mouth, and his eyes were enlightened.[13] It is also that most abundant water which gushed forth suddenly from the rock struck by Moses.[14] Approach freely, then, to this most sweet banquet of Christ, in which most certain salvation and life are promised you. For if the garments of Christ,[15] and the handkerchiefs and aprons of Paul,[16] gave health by even a light touch, how much more will the very body of Christ, worthily received, free you from all your infirmities and depraved affections? If by the word of Christ alone Lazarus, four days dead, was raised and came forth from the dead,[17] how much more will the very body of Christ, having entered your breast, quicken you, and, delivering you from the death of sin, cleanse your conscience? Come then, faithful soul: if you are unclean, approach the fountain of purity.[18] Are you hungry? Approach, to be fed, to the life-giving and unfailing bread, which fills the hungry with good things. Are you sick? This will be the most efficacious medicine for your infirmity. Do you suffer an issue [of blood], and cannot be healed by physicians?[19] Touch with full faith, with the woman who had the issue of blood, the hem of the garment of Jesus, the most sacred host, and you will be stanched. If you feel yourself struck by the serpents of perverse temptations,[20] what remains but that you look upon the brazen serpent without venom, Christ lifted up on the cross? Do you perhaps complain that you are blind, feeble, and lame? You must remember that such as these are invited to the supper of the great King, and are compelled to come in.[21] "I am slippery," you say, "and unstable"; but this bread strengthens the heart of man. Are you sad and anxious? But this wine gladdens the inner man.[22] Do many things disquiet you? Cleave to him who calms the troubled waves. Are you a pilgrim away from the Lord? But in the strength of this food you

will walk unto the mount of God.[23] These wonders the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures, and the holy men of God inspired by the Spirit of God, speak concerning this admirable Sacrament. Of which St Cyprian, writing most learnedly and at the same time most religiously in his sermon on the Lord's Supper, says: "This unleavened bread, the true and pure food, through the species and the sacrament sanctifies us by touch, enlightens us by faith, confirms us to Christ by truth." Let all, therefore, who are devoted to the Lord's Passion approach this most wholesome bread; and let them not be afraid to receive, as frequently as they can, this most sweet manna, in which they may cross the desert of this toilsome world without peril of life. Let him not fear to approach this saving bread who wishes to have his heart strengthened in the Lord for overcoming the most wicked demons, who continually lie in wait for our salvation. Let no one hesitate to receive this most plentiful and fattest bread, which gives eternal delights. Let there be no one, finally, who fears to receive frequently, and even most frequently, this hearth-cake and unleavened bread, prepared in the womb of the Virgin, baked on the altar of the cross; in the strength of which, for forty days and forty nights, that is, in the very brief space of this life, we may arrive no longer unto the mount of God, Horeb, that is, the desert, but unto Mount Thabor, that is, the purity and glory of God.

[1] Matthew 26.

[2] Luke 22.

[3] Luke 14.

[4] Psalm 103.

[5] John 6.

[6] Wisdom 16.

[7] Genesis 49.

[8] Genesis [1]4.

[9] 3 Kings 1[9].

[10] Genesis 2.

[11] Exodus 12.

[12] Judges 13.

[13] 1 Kings 14.

[14] Numbers 20.

[15] Matthew 14.

[16] Acts 19.

[17] John 11.

[18] Gerson.

[19] Mark 5.

[20] Numbers 21.

[21] Luke 14.

[22] Psalm 103.

[23] 3 Kings 19.

PRAISE BE TO GOD.

Poem on the Admirable Sacrament of the Eucharist

When the right hand of the eternal Godhead was founding the world,
Pouring out riches of every kind by the power of goodness,
For the things in which, at their birth, life had been implanted,
Nourishment was added in the places close at hand.
Herb, shrub and tree, sending down their roots,
Draw sap from the rich soil, that they may grow;
All animals live on the plants they graze,
Or, according to their own condition, on other foods.
Above all man, the king of the world, for whose nourishment
Earth, sea and air provide such varied feasts.
But if man was to live a twofold life
(Since the mind refuses to live in the manner of a brute),
When its own nourishment was given to the bodily life,
Was no food then prepared for souls?
For the happy garden did not, for the first-born mortals,
Bring forth that by which the spirit might be living;
And the vital tree was of no profit to the spirit;
It was the guardian only of the vegetative soul.
To divine and pure souls a divine [food] was given,
Such as is the food that is given to the angelic minds too.
But after guilt, doing its harm, had made them like the beasts,
The mind was robbed of its food.
And it would still be dead, had not Christ, in pity,
Restored his beloved work anew by his death.
The divine image, which had been lost, lived again,
And the inner man is reborn with a new light.
And that he may nourish here the heavenly life with heavenly fuel,
And bring his age to its fullness,
He gave us his body with his sacred blood
(O gift overflowing with exceeding love!).
Granted that the angel, by feeding on ambrosia and drinking nectar,
Fills, delights and gladdens himself,
He may have envied us these dishes, if any
Envy can be in angelic minds.
Let the food of those above (as is fitting) be the more sumptuous:
Yet this one certainly suits the mortal better.
While in the mirror of faith we behold the enigmas of eternal things,
And the earthen body holds the soul,
The divine gifts lie beneath sensible forms,
And man grasps the species by sense, the reality by the mind.

Above all, the sacred Synaxis sets forth lofty mysteries,
Where signs not its own contain Christ.
Human problems yield to the divine words:
No faith could be more pleasing to God.
Great indeed is the faith, and it merits great rewards,
Which now lie hidden, veiled, but hereafter, unveiled, lie open.
For the food with which the angel is fed is the same as that with which
The child of Christ [is fed]: this food is Christ, man and God.
O wretched is he who does not taste these rich delights!
How wise is he to whom your flesh, O Christ, is savoury!
Hungering, he fills himself with Christ; filled, he hungers still,
Now like those above, and neighbour to their choirs.
But whoever does not care to receive Christ veiled,
Him Christ unveiled will never receive.
Mortals, therefore, know your life,
And let the great Gift receive its due honour.
For if in the desert the loathing of the manna from the air
Brought forth a terrible death for the Hebrews,
What will contempt of the heavenly, or divine, bread
Bring forth, but the pyre of Tartarus?
Ah, what does it profit to chew the thorns of riches, the acorns of honours,
Or the dung of pleasures, I pray?
Mortal flesh will beget nothing but death for him who loves it;
But the living flesh of Christ is to give life.
There is no need of a price; the banquets are set out free:
Provided only that no one unclean seek them rashly.
Let him believe, hope, love, and adorn himself with these virtues,
And so let him dare to go to the royal feasts.
Here too, the more frequent a guest you can be,
The more benefits you will carry away from the royal table.
And that you should be frequent, reason and faith persuade,
And piety, and hope, and the nature of the food.
If, as often as your body languishes with stubborn disease,
You send for one to relieve the ill by the healer's art,
Why, as often as you have defiled your mind with some crime,
Do you not take the sacred medicines with a pure hand?
Approach, then, frequently, and do not despise so great a table,
From which so much benefit will come to you.
And while it is lawful to draw near to the sacred table,
Let love on the one side, fear on the other, draw the stirred hearts.
For fear holds back, because man knows himself unworthy;
Love urges him to receive the One who deigns to give himself.

Thus the guest, well received, if he is well entertained,
Will give a happy and everlasting hospitality.

Praise be to God.

The Author to the Pious Reader, Greeting

When in the past months, friendly reader, I had hastily gathered certain things on the frequent use of most holy Communion, not with the intention that they should be published, but to satisfy the wishes and the devotion of certain friends and pious men, who, since they ate the bread of heavenly life rather often, and indeed with great fruit, desired to have something with which, even when others clamoured against them and disapproved, they might justify the reason for what they did, it happened that these very things were afterwards printed at Naples, and that what I had noted in passing for the sake of my friends came into the hands of all. Wherefore it seemed good to several friends (led perhaps by the convenience of our own house's press) that I should call those things, such as they were, back to the anvil and send them out anew. But I, knowing well that there are very many others in our Society far more excellent in talent, in learning, and in eloquence, who could set forth this very argument (as all things) more copiously and more elegantly, and desiring to measure myself by my own foot, long resisted such admonitions and counsels of my friends. But at length their zeal overcame my reluctant mind, especially since the vote of those who have been appointed censors of books to be printed in the city was added to it. And so I took pen in hand, and, according to the slenderness of my powers, I arranged in a somewhat better order those things which before seemed little digested, and allowed my name to be put in the title of the little book: both because it would be suspect, and indeed prohibited, in the world to publish any book without a name; and so that, if I had erred anywhere (which, as is the way of men, could easily happen), it might be attributed to its author. Concerning the purpose of my undertaking, I wish you, pious reader, to be advised of this: that I neither think nor do anything against pious men who, led by good and pious reasoning, judge that the bridle rather than the spurs should be used with certain persons who communicate rather often from custom rather than from devotion; whom, namely, they do not keep away, but warn, lest with unwashed hands (as the saying is) and with a conscience insufficiently proved they should rush upon these sacrosanct mysteries; but that we have undertaken this disputation against those who, deceived by I know not what reasons, or moved by affections little pious, try to hinder the devotion and spiritual progress of pious men, and to turn away simple souls, on fire with the charity of Christ, from Christ by whatever means they can. If against these we shall perhaps seem to anyone at times to have flared up and to have been rather sharp (for the zeal of God urged us, as the unworthiness of the matter required), there will be less for him to wonder at. Since, therefore, we wished only to restrain these men and to refute their reasons, which are empty but plausible in appearance, we have said nothing here about the exact and most exquisite manner of proving and preparing oneself for Communion (of which perhaps elsewhere); but we have spoken only of that which is altogether necessary in order that the food of life may be for life to those who receive it, and which seemed to suit the explanation of the question proposed. Otherwise it is easy to deduce from this that he will carry away more spiritual fruit from the reception of this divine and unspeakable Sacrament who has prepared himself more by prayers, meditations, and all pious works, and has purged the palate of his mind, so that he may taste and see how sweet the Lord is. Farewell, pious Reader, and help our efforts with your good wishes and prayers.

TO GOD ALONE BE GLORY.