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A Blessed Easter to all of our families, friends, and benefactors!



Seminarians prepare to receive Holy Communion at Easter Midnight Mass



The Chanting of Tenebrae on Wednesday of Holy Week



Fr. Gronenthal chants the epistle for the Mass of Chrism on Holy Thursday



"Behold the wood of the Cross, on which hung the Savior of the world." Adoration of the Cross on Good Friday



The Blessing of the Paschal Fire and Paschal Candle



Rev. Mr. Carlos Borja chants one of the lessons at the Easter Vigil

Father Connell Answers Moral Questions

by Very Rev. Francis J. Connell, C.SS.R., S.T.D., LL.D., L.H.D.

Holy Communion for the Mentally Retarded Child

Question: What course should be followed in allowing a mentally retarded child to receive Holy Communion?

Answer: The questioner presents a problem which occurs quite frequently, and yet is not easy to solve. According to the discipline prevailing in the Latin Church, a child who is so defective intellectually as to have no understanding or appreciation of the Blessed Sacrament may not be given Holy Communion even in danger of death. The Code prescribes that outside the danger of death (for in danger of death all that is necessary is that the little one be able to distinguish the Blessed Sacrament from common food and to adore the Body of Christ reverently) a child must understand according to his capacity those mysteries of faith that are necessary for salvation by necessity of means, and approach the Holy Eucharist with the devotion suitable to his tender years.

In practice it is often difficult to apply these rules to children who have not attained to normal intellectual development. Evidently, those who are classified as idiots (with an I.Q. less than 20) should be excluded from the reception of the Holy Eucharist. But this same rule should not be applied to morons (with an I.Q. from 50 to 70) nor even to all imbeciles (with an I.Q. from 20 to 50). Those persons who are charged with the spiritual care of retarded children who offer any hope of reaching the required mental capacity for Holy Communion should be prepared to give them a long course of instruction, patiently repeating over and over again the necessary doctrines. When this work of zeal has been properly performed, many of those children who at first seemed incapable of the minimum knowledge required for First Communion may eventually manifest the requirements for even the frequent reception of the Blessed Eucharist. Such, at least, is the belief of those who have had considerable experience in caring for children of this type.

Thus, a religious engaged in the care of mentally retarded children wrote:

The mentally deficient child can arrive at an appreciation of religious truths if given instruction adapted to his mental capacity. Those children who have been given formal religious instruction over a period of years are found to possess a degree of knowledge and ability for practical application of the truths of Catholicism sufficient to permit them to receive the sacraments of Penance, Holy Communion and Confirmation. From the data obtained in the study it would seem that a period of three years or more of religious instruction prior to the reception of the sacraments is desirable for those children on the higher levels of the imbecile group and also those in the moron group.

At the convention of the National Catholic Educational Association in 1952, Monsignor Feider, chaplain of St. Coletta School, Jefferson, Wisconsin, made this statement: "Our patients range in I.Q. from 30 to 80, with an average I.Q. of about 50. According to our experience, all patients with an I.Q. of 40 or higher can, with proper direction, be brought to the sacraments. I also find that most of those in the range from 30 to 40 I.Q. can be trained to be communicants."

It should also be noted that the decree *Quam singulari* in which St. Pius X rendered the Holy Eucharist available to children as soon as they reach the age of reason contains the comforting assurance that they need not possess the full use of reason. "Nor is the full use of reason necessary, but the incipient use is sufficient—that is, some kind of use of reason (aliqualis usus rationis)."

In this connection it is useful to quote the prescription of the Code regarding those who have the right and duty to judge the fitness of a child for Holy Communion: "Regarding the sufficient disposition of children for First Communion the judgment should pertain to their confessor and their parents or those who take the place of the parents. It is the duty of the pastor to see to it, even by an examination if he prudently judges it opportune, that children shall not approach the Holy Table before the use of reason or without sufficient disposition."

Those who have the spiritual care of mentally retarded children should not be too ready to decide that a child is not sufficiently intelligent to receive Holy Communion. I am inclined to say that any child who can express ideas in speech, even though very simply and confusedly, can be presumed to be capable of receiving Holy Communion if proper training is provided.

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