

## A NOTE ON THE EUCHARISTIC FAST

Two years ago Pope Pius XII, in the Apostolic Constitution, *Christus Dominus*, granted a relaxation of the Eucharistic fast under certain conditions, with a view to facilitating the celebration of Holy Mass and the reception of Holy Communion for those who were forced to suffer grave inconvenience in the fast from midnight, or to forego the use of the Blessed Sacrament. Every priest has seen the relief and consolation this concession has brought to the faithful, and the great help it has been to priests in certain difficult circumstances.

This generous concession, however, has not been without its problems. As it excludes solid food after midnight even for those who must work all night at heavy labor, it has removed a more liberal concession which had previously existed in some circumstances, by which night workers could sometimes be permitted solid food up to four hours before receiving Communion. Also, the conditions of the present concessions are somewhat complicated, so that the faithful do not well understand them, and even the priests who are to be consulted by the faithful find it difficult to remember and interpret the concessions.

These concessions were a notable departure from the age-old law of the Eucharistic fast, and had to be hedged about with careful precautions. Now, after two years of experience with the concessions, it might be permissible to look for indications of the possibility of simplifying the legislation. To this writer it seems that a short statement, such as we find in the canons of the Code of Canon Law, could set down the regulations in a way that would relieve much anxiety on the part of priests who have to counsel the faithful. Perhaps it might even be made so simple that consultation of a priest would not be needed, as is now the case in regard to the fast from midnight.

In view of the fact that people who wish to communicate usually go to Mass soon after rising, unless they are prevented by necessary work, or the lack of an early Mass, or a long distance to the church, it would seem that an unconditional permission to take something by way of drink up until one hour before Communion would not reach much beyond the number of faithful who could now avail themselves of the conditional concession of something by way of drink. Even if solid food were permitted up to three hours before any and every Communion, as it is now permitted for evening Communion, ordinarily people would not rise early enough to take solid food after the previous midnight, and the practice of the law would for the most part be the same as under the present law of fasting from midnight. An exception to this would be the case of night workers, and these might well be

permitted solid nourishment as they were in many cases under an earlier privilege, and as day workers are now when communicating in the evening.

Hence it would seem that there would be no extraordinary change in actual practice, and a great simplification in legislation would result, if the canons on the Eucharistic fast were revised in somewhat the following fashion:

Ante celebrationem Missae vel receptionem sacrae communionis, abstinence a potu alcoholico a media nocte, nisi quod potiones inter mensam suetae congrua moderatione inter refectioem sumi possint, exclusis semper liquoribus; cibus solidus ne sumatur intra tres horas ante receptionem SS. Sacramenti, nec aliquid per modum potus, excepta aqua naturali sine ullius elementi admixtione, intra horam unam.

Infirmi autem, etiamsi non decumbant, possunt nulla adjecta ante communionem temporis limitatione, sumere aliquid per modum medicinae etiam solidae, exclusis alcoholicis, atque urgente notabili incommodo, de consulto confessarii si non sint sacerdotes, etiam aliquid per modum potus.

Such or a similar simplification of the law would surely be received with gratitude by the faithful and their shepherds, and we may respectfully and obediently hope that eventually our Supreme Shepherd will find it opportune to introduce some such simplification.

*Hiroshima, Japan*

HILARY R. WERTS, S.J.