



Holy Communion for children.

PRIVATE FIRST COMMUNION.

“THE Eucharist” — St. John Chrysostom says — “makes all men one in Jesus Christ.” During the first ages of the Church, in East and West alike, it was considered wrong to exclude children from this mystic union with Christ, and accordingly the Holy Eucharist was administered even to those children who had not yet attained to the use of reason. The very fact that they had been made members of Jesus Christ was considered to give them a right to receive His Body and Blood. The Church has, however, changed her discipline in this matter. Yet she has never declared children to be incapable of receiving the Holy Eucharist. It is true that she always regarded Baptism as sufficient by itself for a candidate. Her only object, therefore, in adding Holy Communion was to arm the little ones more completely against the outward assaults of the Evil One, without implying thereby that Holy Communion was an indispensable condition for their salvation.

This primitive usage was gradually abandoned on account of the unseemly mishaps to which it exposed the Blessed Sacrament. The practice began to fall into partial disuse in the ninth century, and still more in the eleventh. In the twelfth century, its neglect became so pronounced, that by the thirteenth it had become all but universal.

But though the Church is no longer accustomed to give Communion to infants, she has in no sense relaxed her discipline in the case of children who, to some extent, have reached the use of reason.

The obligation of Holy Communion rests upon a divine command. The Master gives us a distinct precept: “Except ye eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you shall not have life in you.” It is also