

self, we shall doubtless see bishops, who have appointed a somewhat advanced age for solemn First Communion—such as eleven, twelve, thirteen or fourteen years completed—lowering that age to nine or ten, at all events allowing their clergy a larger discretion in the matter. People fancy that knowledge of the Eucharist is beyond the grasp of children. They consider it better to instil it into them later on when they will be better able to assimilate it, and that it is even more rational and natural to end up with such teaching, as being too abstract and too far beyond the reach of the senses. So far from this being the case, I venture to assert it as a fact that there is no kind of knowledge which gains readier access to the mind and the sympathies of a child, and therefore that it is more reasonable and more logical, if not to start with it, at all events to link the idea of the Eucharist with such notions as one impresses upon a child before all others. At six years of age children may usually be taught the elementary notions of the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist.

“If one comes across children—and many such may be met with—who have attained the age of discretion before being old enough for the solemn celebration—children, let us say, of eight, nine, or ten—why should they not be allowed to share in the public ceremony by the side of their older, but less intelligent companions? Surely these poor children, whose only fault is that they are less backward and more pious than others, that they have learnt their catechism more quickly and conceived a stronger desire for the Bread of Angels—surely they do not deserve—what is to them—a most bitter mortification—that of being shut out from a festivity in which they will see their comrades sharing with beaming countenances? Moreover, as the Bishop of Annecy points out, this exclusion robs them of the great good they would derive from the general Communion, the retreat, the impressive ceremony, the hymn-singing, the family gathering, the mutual joy of parents and children, and finally the renewal of baptismal vows and the consecration to the Blessed Virgin.”

*(to be continued)*