

Holy Communion for Children.

Public or Solemn First Communion.

(Continued)



THE *Etudes Religieuses*, conducted by the Fathers of the Society of Jesus, give the following historical account of the origin of Solemn Communion :

“The practice of celebrating the First Communion in a public and solemn manner is neither old, nor of universal adoption. It was formerly the custom to apply to children, in regard to the Eucharist, the same canonical rule issued by Innocent III at the Lateran Council, that is still applied to them in the case of the Sacrament of Penance.

“As soon as parents perceived that reason had dawned upon their child and that he was able to distinguish good from evil, they helped him to examine his conscience and to make acts of contrition, and then sent him to the priest, who gave or withheld absolution according as he judged the child capable of it or not. There is no mention of a First Confession day. Just in the same manner, the father or mother explained to the child about the wonderful Sacrament of the Altar, and when they saw that he was sufficiently instructed and desirous of receiving that divine Food at the Holy Table, along with the rest of the faithful, they would take him to the priest, and the latter accepted him if he considered him fit. They considered that it was the child's dispositions that needed testing rather than his age.

“Nevertheless the question of age also came to be discussed, and all did not arrive at the same solution.

“Benedict XIV, cites two different views. Some thought a child to be possessed of sufficient discretion if he was capable of receiving absolution, in as much as the canonical rule of Lateran by imposing the law of