A note from Fr. Anthony:

God’s peace and blessing be with you all! As we navigate through the challenges of the coronavirus and sheltering in, we are continuing to be united in prayer for those who are sick and suffering, as well as for the well-being and stamina of all those who are working to care for the sick. For many of us, this means withdrawing from our usual routine and keeping our distance to help slow the spread of the virus. But, what if part of our regular schedule involves receiving the greatest possible gift in the world? How do we sacrifice that gift?

Of course, I am talking about the gift of Jesus truly present in the Most Holy Eucharist. The “Source and Summit” of our Faith—the Eucharist is Jesus, God with us, and is the greatest possible gift we could ever receive. Although a great challenge for many of us, most understand this time of sacrifice as an offering for the health of others, especially those among us who are more vulnerable to serious effects from this illness. The fact that this is a hard sacrifice is a good thing! The difficulty shows us where our hearts really are and that we understand the truth of the Eucharist. If we didn’t believe Jesus was really there, this sacrifice wouldn’t be nearly as hard to offer. Beside the genuine test of faith, this time offers us a unique opportunity to work on our life of prayer and grow our practice of devotions. For those who are longing for the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, this time also offers the opportunity to practice making “Spiritual Communion” as we participate in the Masses offered online.

What is Spiritual Communion? As the Guidelines for Reception of Holy Communion state: “All who are not receiving Holy Communion are encouraged to express in their hearts a prayerful desire for unity with the Lord Jesus and with one another” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1996). This is called a Spiritual Communion. While reception of Holy Communion is incredibly significant, Understanding the Mass teaches, “That is not to say that the fruits of the sacrifice are only those gained through sacramental participation, or Communion. Even when we do not receive Communion, participation in Mass yields immense spiritual benefits, fruits that our limited understanding cannot measure. Nevertheless, the full effect of the Eucharistic sacrifice is reserved to worshippers who are in the state to receive Communion and do receive it.” So, those who cannot receive Communion can still gain spiritual fruit from the Mass, uniting themselves to Christ through desire and prayer.

At various times in our Church history, Spiritual Communion was really more the norm than the exception. Many saints lived during eras when reception of Communion was very rare, arising from many factors like legality of Christianity, availability of priests, or a humble sense of unworthiness to receive our Lord, among many others. In his book The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Fr. Michael Muller teaches, “It is well for those who can do so in the course of the morning to retire to their room nearly at the time which they know to be the hour when the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is being offered in the Church, and, after having implored the grace of God, to perform with recollection and fervor the duty of religion, to kneel down before the Crucifix, and with all the sentiments of devotion possible to unite heart and soul to the Heart of Jesus in the holy Mass, and then read or say the same prayers which they would have said had they been actually present in the church, never forgetting to make the spiritual Communion, which may be made in any place, and at any hour of the day or night.”

Of course one huge advantage we have now that hasn’t been possible in the long history of the Church—we are able to pray the Mass together through technology by live-streaming or whatever other methods are being used. This allows us all to be participating in the prayer of the Mass from a distance, as well as having the opportunity to “see” Jesus truly present on the altar. Just after the priest receives Communion, at what would be the normal time people come forward for Communion, you are encouraged to tell Jesus in your heart of your desire to receive Him. This can be in your own words or, if you prefer, this commonly known prayer below. Our faith tells us that by the grace of Christ we will navigate the challenges of our time…Let’s unite ourselves in mind and heart to Jesus this day, trusting in Him and His love for us!

An Act of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Blessed Sacrament. I love You above all things and I desire You in my soul. Since I cannot now receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though You were already there, I embrace You and unite myself holy to You. Let me not be ever separated from You. Amen.