

My Neighbor Said:

## “True or False: You Can’t Take Communion Unless You’ve Been Present From the Gospel to the Consecration”

*Imagine that you have decided to invite your family and friends to your house for Thanksgiving dinner. With loving sacrifice, you put together a real banquet for them. But at the last minute, your favorite nephew calls to say he’ll be late. What would you do?*

The Eucharistic banquet (from Greek *eucharistos*, “thanksgiving”) is “the source and summit of the Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium*, 11). Everything we are and do as followers of Jesus Christ is focused on the Eucharist and bound up in it.

This is why Catholics are required to attend Mass on Sundays and other holy days of obligation, “unless excused for a serious reason” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2181). Catholics are not required to receive communion every Sunday, but they are required to receive at least once a year, preferably during the Easter season (*Code of Canon Law*, 920). The Church requires this to remind people that they need the sacramental graces of the Eucharist.

Inevitably the question arises, “How much of the Mass do I have to attend to fulfill the Sunday obligation?” Sometimes various guidelines are proposed, as in the original question above. But **neither canon law nor the *Catechism* defines such a rule.** The Church says, “Come to Mass,” period.

Let’s go back to our opening parable. If your favorite nephew said he had car trouble and couldn’t make it to your house until after the appetizers were served, would you tell him, “Don’t bother to come if you can’t be here on time”? I hope not!

You are God’s favorite, and He wants you to be at Mass. If, after making a good-faith effort, you arrive late, you are still welcome. If you have to leave before the end of Mass because of illness, caregiving duties, or some other grave reason, you have not failed in your Sunday obligation.

Likewise, **the Church does not require you to attend a specified part of the Mass to qualify for the Eucharist.** As long as you meet the ordinary requirements (being a baptized Catholic, not conscious of any grave sin, etc.), you could conceivably walk into the church, join the communion line, receive Jesus, and walk out again, if you had a grave reason for doing so. The Church is so eager to share the graces of the Eucharist that she would rather have you there for 10 minutes than not at all.

Pious guidelines, no matter how well intentioned, do not constitute rules of law. Jesus had some pointed words to say about those who “bind up heavy burdens and lay them on others’ shoulders” (Matthew 23:4).

**For further reading:** [“Participation in the Most Holy Eucharist,”](#) *Code of Canon Law*, 912–922; [“How Late Is Too Late for Mass?”](#) and [“You Can Be Late and Still Receive”](#) (Catholic Answers).

Do you have questions about God, faith, life, the Church, or other related topics? Drop them into the Question Box next to the Parish Bulletin Board. We will answer them ASAP and post them in FlockNotes and on the Bulletin Board each week.