

My Neighbor Said:

“Did Mother Teresa Condemn Communion in the Hand?”

“Wherever I go in the whole world, the thing that makes me saddest is seeing people receive communion in the hand.”

This quote, attributed to Mother Teresa (St. Teresa of Calcutta), is all over the Internet and social media. It is often used as a trump card in arguments about how we should receive communion: “Mother Teresa was against communion in the hand, and she’s a saint! How can you disagree with a saint?”

However, as Abraham Lincoln once said, “Don’t believe everything you see on the Internet.”

This story seems to have started with a broadcast talk by Fr. George Rutler, a Catholic priest. He referred to her sadness at seeing the Eucharist treated irreverently. This was quickly transformed into the quote above. But does this truly represent Mother Teresa’s thought?

Not according to Mother Teresa’s own order, the Missionaries of Charity. The website of the Mother Teresa Center in California rebutted the quote: “This statement does not seem authentic to us. We have never heard Mother Teresa saying these words nor read them in her writings” (Mother Teresa Center, “Mother Teresa: On Receiving Holy Communion in the Hand”). They also included it on their page of “Quotes Falsely Attributed to Mother Teresa.”

Fr. Rutler attempted to correct the record in an article published soon after her canonization. [Mother Teresa] told me once after Mass that the “saddest thing in the world” was to watch people receiving the Blessed Sacrament irreverently. She motioned with her hands but **she was speaking of the inward disposition of the soul and not the physical manner of Communion, whether in the hand or on the tongue.** I mentioned this in a broadcast talk that was widely interpreted as Mother’s disapproval of Communion in the hand. ...But Mother did not want to be invoked in polemics. No sentimentalist, she ordered me to write a correction for a newspaper that had reported that she opposed Communion in the hand. ... I have lost count of the number of times I have explained this, and not a few have ignored and even resented what I wrote at Mother’s behest.

For further reading: “[Mother Teresa: On Receiving Holy Communion in the Hand](#)” and “[Quotes Falsely Attributed to Mother Teresa](#)” (Mother Teresa Center, archived July 6, 2010); “[On the Canonization of Saint Teresa of Calcutta](#),” Fr. George Rutler, *Crisis*, August 24, 2016, para. 8).

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.