

How to help a priest with a strong accent



Question: Our pastor has a strong accent, and I can't understand what he is saying except for a few words here and there that I try to piece together. He is otherwise enthusiastic, zealous for conveying the Gospel message and prepares his homilies well.

Is there some advice you can give as to what I and others should do to help him?

– **Dorothy**, via email

Answer: The first step, of course, would be to talk with the priest himself. As you note, he is a good and zealous priest, and surely he wants to be understood when he speaks or celebrates Mass. Perhaps a group of you with similar concerns could approach him. Sometimes it is a simple matter of the priest learning to slow down when he speaks and to consciously speak distinctly. Priests from Africa and India often speak quite rapidly, and this, combined with an accent, reduces intelligibility.

In more difficult situations where the accent is very heavy, a language coach or speech therapist can help him learn to speak with a more local accent. The diocese should ensure that priests assigned to parishes receive this help where necessary. If the priest is receptive to your concerns, perhaps this will help. However, if he is not receptive, it may be necessary to contact the diocesan priest personnel director and advise him of the problem and request that the priest be assisted to improve. At all times, you will want to make it clear that you are trying to help a good priest, not simply criticize. This will be especially important if you need to consult with the diocese.

No Communion for non-Catholics

Question: Where in the Bible does it say only Catholics can receive Communion? A non-Catholic friend of mine attended a funeral Mass for her Catholic father and was denied Communion. This can be awkward and even seen as rude or insulting. I don't have an adequate answer for her or others.

– **Sisto Sandoval**, Lake Havasu, Arizona

Answer: In this matter, many see the closed Communion of the Catholic Church as somehow rude or unwelcoming. But, in fact, we are trying to show respect to non-Catholics by not asking them to affirm teachings of our faith that they are not ready to accept. When one approaches holy Communion, they are expressing and affirming a union with Christ the head and also the Church, which is his body. As such, we are not just affirming the True Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but also we are affirming that we are in communion with the Church and what is taught.

When one is received into full communion with the Church, they recite the following: "I believe and profess all that the holy Catholic Church believes, teaches and professes to be revealed by God." Every person who comes forth for holy Communion implicitly affirms this statement of communion when they say "Amen" upon receiving holy Communion. It is not respectful or welcoming for us to insist that a non-Catholic pronounce this "Amen." As you can see, there are perhaps some Catholics who should not come forward if they are dissenting on significant Church teachings. Some, too, because they are aware of unconfessed mortal sins, should not approach for holy Communion.

As for a biblical source for this teaching, we should recall that the first Mass took place in the context of a Passover meal. Regarding this meal, only the members of the family, those of the household, were to attend together and partake of

the paschal lamb (cf. Ex 12:3). Hence, while it is true that Jesus was famous for a kind of open table fellowship with both Pharisees and those regarded as “sinners,” the Passover meal was not a meal open to all. It was open only to the members of the family. The early Church carefully guarded the sacred mysteries and admitted only the baptized. And while Masses today are more open to the general public, we cannot offer holy Communion to non-Catholics out of respect that they aren’t ready to offer the “Amen” to the full communion with Christ and his body, the Church.

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