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Timothy: Preparing for The Holy Eucharist within the Community when Communication is Non-verbal

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Abstract: Persons with intellectual disabilities are still regularly refused access to the Eucharist, as illustrated in an article in the *Washington Post*. Although Pope Francis and several Bishops' Conferences and the new Directory for Catechesis (n°269–272) have made it clear that Catholics with disabilities have a right to participate in the sacraments as all other members of the ecclesial community, many church leaders still refrain from allowing persons with profound intellectual disabilities to access the Eucharist. This article investigates the experience of a pastoral team that prepared First Communion of a young boy with profound intellectual disabilities. The experience raised practical theological, pedagogical and pastoral ecclesial issues to be solved. These issues structure the article.

Keywords: Disability, sacraments, practical theology, catechesis, eucharist

Zusammenfassung: Menschen mit schweren geistigen Behinderungen werden noch immer regelmäßig von der Feier des Abendmahls ausgeschlossen, obwohl Papst Franziskus und mehrere Bischofskonferenzen und das neue Direktorium für Katechese klargestellt haben, dass die Sakramente allen katholischen Gläubigen offenstehen müssen. Dieser Aufsatz berichtet von den Erfahrungen und Herausforderungen eines gemeindepädagogischen Teams dabei, einen geistig schwerbehinderten Jungen auf die Erstkommunion vorzubereiten. Im Zuge dieses Vorhabens waren praktisch-theologische, pädagogische und kontextuelle Probleme zu lösen.

Stichwörter: Behinderung, Sakramente, praktische Theologie, Katechese, Eucharistie

An article from the *Washington Post* spiked my interest very recently. It told the story of a boy who has autism and was denied access to the Holy Eucharist be-

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cause he couldn't tell right from wrong according to the parish pastor.¹ Although the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops states that people with disabilities "have a right to participate in the sacraments as fully as other members of the local ecclesial community,"² many church leaders still refrain from enabling persons with profound intellectual disabilities to access the eucharistic table. This article investigates an experience in France, where a young boy with multiple severe disabilities was prepared to celebrate First Holy Communion. Several issues were raised that constituted barriers to be overcome to make this experience possible: there were practical theological issues, pedagogical questions and pastoral ecclesial issues to be solved.

Here is the story that sets the framework in which this contribution will unfold:

Timothy³ is almost eight years old. He is the eldest of five children and is preparing to receive the Holy Eucharist in his parish in Alsace, near the German border, in France. Nothing exceptional, really – except that Timothy has no arms, he doesn't walk, he doesn't speak. No one knows exactly what Timothy understands from what is said to him, he participates in his own way in the life of his family, who loves him dearly, and when one sees the big kisses Timothy gives them, one can only conclude that Timothy in turn deeply loves his family. When I met his mother for the first time, in the context of a group for mothers of sick or disabled children, she told us how the parish priest suggested that Timothy celebrate his First Communion. She had been surprised at first, but after discussions with her husband – and at the insistence of the parish priest, who renewed his proposal three times – she decided to contact the Diocesan Service for the Pastoral Care of the Disabled to see how Timothy could be prepared to receive communion.

Several questions immediately arose: What does it mean for Timothy to celebrate the Eucharist? What meaning can the Eucharist, the communion with the body and blood of Christ, have for someone who does not absorb any food or drink by mouth? In fact, Timothy uses a gastrostomy tube for nutritional support, he is fed through a gastric tube and does not swallow anything. Here we are faced with

1 Antonia Noori Farzan, "An Autistic Boy was Denied First Communion because He Can't Tell Right from Wrong, His Family Says," Washington Post (website), accessed Feb 29, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/02/28/autistic-boy-denied-communion-church/>.

2 "Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (website), accessed Feb 29, 2020 <http://www.usccb.org/about/divine-worship/policies/guidelines-sacraments-persons-with-disabilities.cfm>.

3 Names and places have been altered to safeguard privacy. Timothy's family has read and accepted this manuscript.

numerous theological and practical questions such as how to communicate to Timothy something of the meaning of the Eucharist? Timothy does not communicate by word of mouth and his understanding of what is said to him is – at best – limited. This is a pedagogical question, behind which lies another important theological question, which is how far understanding is indispensable for someone to be allowed access to the sacraments. Finally, there was also the issue of how to communicate and make the parish community understand the meaning of the process. This is an ecclesial and pastoral question. These three questions structure this contribution, and while this essay focuses narrowly on preparing a person with multiple disabilities for Holy Eucharist, the implications are much broader. Adults with profound cognitive impairments are also denied access to the Eucharist and persons in advanced stages of dementia often have to deal with severe dysphagia-issues, which means they have difficulty swallowing. Through the story of Timothy, I hope to start a conversation on liturgical and sacramental practice for people with cognitive disabilities in line with the works of John Swinton⁴ and Léon van Ommen.⁵

1 Theological and Practical Issues: The Meaning of Eucharistic Communion for Timothy and for All Members of the Community

“The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life,” says the official Catechism of the Catholic Church, using the words of the dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, “in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch.”⁶ Communion with the Bread of Life creates a personal relationship with Christ; it is a sign of the covenant between God and human beings, all human beings, regardless of their abilities. This means that even for people who are unable to swallow (dysphagia), the Eucharist allows an encounter with Christ. By convenience, by habit, by practicality, this communion is almost always achieved by eating the bread and/or drinking the

⁴ John Swinton, *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God* (London: SCM Press, 2012); John Swinton, *Becoming Friends of Time: Disability, Timefulness, and Gentle Discipleship* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2016).

⁵ Armand Léon van Ommen, *Suffering in Worship: Anglican Liturgy in Relation to Stories of Suffering People*, (London: Routledge, 2017).

⁶ “Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1324,” The Vatican (website), accessed Feb 27, 2020, www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/ccc_toc.htm.

wine. But can the meaning of the Eucharist be reduced to manducation or deglutition?

If the Eucharist is an encounter with a person, who is Christ, how can one signify the essence of this encounter to Timothy through a piece of bread or a drop of wine that the boy cannot swallow? In the pastoral team, together with the parents, we reflected for days on practical ways to make the gesture of communion easy, meaningful and explainable in two sentences to a priest for occasions where Timothy would participate in the Eucharist in a parish elsewhere in the world. There was no question of giving him the blood of Christ through the gastric tube, which is too complex, too medical. It was also impossible to put a crumb in his mouth, the risk being that he would spit it out, if ever he accepted that someone came near his mouth. The parish priest suggested to simply bring the host close to Timothy's mouth. The gesture is practical enough and easy to explain, but what meaning should be given to it? The answer to this question would come from Timothy during one of our first encounters.

On a Friday afternoon I go to the boy's home for a meeting in preparation for his First Communion. When I enter the room, Timothy ostensibly turns his back on me and plays with the edge of the carpet, one of his favourite games. Obviously, he doesn't want to see me – at least that is what I understand. I sit down with him on the floor and talk to him about his family who loves him and about Jesus, who loves him infinitely, and about St. Paul who said, "It is when I am weak that I am strong" (2 Cor 12:10). When his mother takes him in her arms to look at me, Timothy gives her a big kiss. Together we discuss the modalities of this first communion, which is a little out of the ordinary. As I prepare to leave the house, Timothy leans over and kisses me. That's when I understand: Timothy shows his love for people with kisses, it's his special way of showing that he loves them. The next week, I prepare photos of his family for him to look at, which he does with great interest, then I bring the photos close to his mouth so that he can kiss them. I then show him a host on which I have pasted a picture of Jesus. When I bring the host to his mouth, Timothy pulls back and looks at me, unsure what to do. "Jesus loves you," I say, "you can tell him you love him." I repeat the gesture. Timothy doesn't move, then, hesitantly, he draws a kiss.

We had found a solution: the Eucharistic gesture for Timothy would be to kiss the host, then his mother – or someone else close to him – would eat it for him. The "holy kiss" is an existing part of the Eucharistic liturgy, occurring after the Lord's Prayer, where it symbolizes the peace of Christ as a gift of God through which the Spirit is poured out unifying the community, making the assembly the body of Christ. It is a sign of communion before communion. Could we find a better way to symbolize the encounter between Timothy and Christ in the Eucharistic bread than with a kiss? Still, we had to find ways to signify the meaning of that kiss to Timothy.

2 Pedagogical and Theological Issues: Catechetical Pedagogy and Non-Verbal Communication

Every pedagogical act necessarily contains a communicational dimension. In typical intersubjective communication, speech would be the preferred vehicle for conveying a message. However, speech and silence always go hand in hand and the cursor between the two moves at leisure on the chessboard of communication. In addition, all communication contains a part of non-verbal language, which is conveyed through touch, smell, hearing and gesture. When the communication situation involves a person who has access to speech and another person who does not, silence can be more prevalent without affecting the quality of the interaction. This is not always easy to accept or understand, as is clearly shown in a passage of the French National Text for Orientation of Catechesis, where the French Catholic Bishops write: “In catechesis, the receiver must be able to manifest himself as an active, conscious and co-responsible subject, not as a silent and passive receiver.”⁷

I cannot help but ask myself: what is so wrong with the silent reception of a message of faith? Doesn't God manifest Godself to Elijah in the silent breeze and to everyone else in the deafening silence of the cross? Obviously, these few words of the bishops were not written against Timothy, who does not speak, does not always actively participate and does not seem very aware of what it is we are preparing with him. In fact, this phrase – which is a quote of the *General Directory for Catechesis* of 1997 – refers to active pedagogy and was written against the long-gone catechetical method of question-and-answer, where children were asked to learn whole passages of doctrine by heart without necessarily understanding them. However, taken out of context and without further explanation, the words of bishops are confusing when read from a disability perspective. It is clear that Timothy was forgotten when writing this text and this omission is blameworthy. No one can know the nature of God's relationship with Timothy and vice versa. There is no doubt that in the eyes of many of his caregivers and others around him, this relationship is necessarily passive and silent from Timothy's side. It is not, however, non-existent or meaningless. If catechesis is not able to address a person like Timothy, a silent receiver, this seriously brings the catechetical responsibility of the Church into question.

⁷ Assemblée plénière de l'épiscopat français, *Texte national pour l'orientation de la catéchèse en France et Principes d'organisation* (Paris: Les Éd. Du Cerf, 2006).

I can't say that it has been easy to find the right ways to communicate the meaning of the Eucharist to Timothy. For people with multiple disabilities like him, the best channel for communication is touch. Interaction takes place through very informal gaze and movement. Of course, this type of non-verbal communication always carries a risk of being misunderstood and misinterpreted. But this risk is present in any form of communication, and it is just exacerbated here by the complexity of Timothy's body language. That is why it was so important that his mother was by my side during the preparation meetings. Not only did she translate Timothy's language, she also pictured the larger story of Timothy's life to me. In this essay about communication and communion, Timothy's story has an important role to play. Surely, the young boy is unable to tell his own story, and he may be particularly vulnerable to constructions of his life story that are inadequate or even detrimental. But that is essentially so for all of us. John Swinton writes:

None of us really tells or owns our stories. We are all people who are storied by a Creator God who resides within a narrative of creation, cross, and redemption that we can share in but can never own. Certainly we need to learn to tell that story well; or perhaps better to let that story tell us well. This is the essence of faithful discipleship. But even there we do not tell our stories on our own. Our stories are told as we learn to live well together in ways that recognize the strength of difference and the difference of strength within the coming Kingdom of God (1 Cor 1:18–31, NIV). It is this radical counternarrative that offers the possibility of redescribing the world in ways which honor, respect and listen to people who have no words but who have much to say.⁸

I hope that telling Timothy's story does just that: it recognizes the power of vulnerability in the Kingdom of God, who reaches out to God's community through a young boy with multiple disabilities. For this community, it seemed important that Timothy understood as much as possible of what it meant to encounter God through the Eucharist.

To allow Timothy to grasp, to touch the host, I gave him a host of 20 cm in diameter (not consecrated of course), which he was able to grasp with his feet and thus enabled him to discover the materiality of the bread. In the evening, his brothers and sisters were happy to taste it. I want to underline this presence of the family community in Timothy's preparation for the Eucharist; its importance will be seen in my third paragraph.

When communicating with a person with a profound intellectual disability, the importance of the emotional aspect of the relationship should not be over-

⁸ John Swinton, "Whose Story Am I? Redescribing Profound Intellectual Disability in the Kingdom of God," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 15, no. 1 (2011): 5-19.

looked. At the end of the 19th century, Dr. Désiré Bourneville already considered that the affectionate character of educators was “an element of happiness and undeniable progress.”⁹ Some 50 years later, Henri Bissonnier took up this idea in the development of his special needs catechetical pedagogy. He would say: “The attitude of the catechist is capital: it is the method of methods.”¹⁰ I think that Timothy took advantage of the fact that I enjoyed being with him, that my relationship with his mother was warm and that his brothers and sisters and his father were happy to see me. This created a friendly atmosphere for the preparation meetings. Timothy never turned his back on me again and I was covered with kisses several times. If we believe that the catechist is in her own way a sacrament, that she is a visible sign that reveals something of the mystery of God to the catechized person, it seems essential to me that the relationship between catechist and catechized be friendly and trusting. However, care must be taken not to close oneself up in a simple affective relationship – especially if one accompanies a person who does not communicate by word of mouth – because it can be exclusive and deceitful, rich but not sufficient. It is indispensable in catechetical work to add a word/a Word despite the limitations of people with a profound intellectual disability: words do not contradict the affect but enlighten the relationship.

Also, with Timothy’s mother, we always began our meetings by lighting a candle, making the sign of the cross and singing the song we had chosen as the opening song for the celebration. After that, I would read from Scripture – from one of the texts to be proclaimed on the day of Timothy’s First Communion. I read to Timothy “when I am weak, then I am strong” from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. I told him that he was surrounded by the love of his family and the love of Jesus, and how he too gave a lot of love to all of us and was strong in love. Another time I read to him the Word of the institution of the Eucharist. I told him that in this fragile little piece of bread, Jesus gives himself with all his love for us and that when we receive Communion, we receive the strength to love in Jesus’ way.

Clearly, we cannot know what Timothy may have grasped from my statements. But to tell the truth, are we so sure that “typical” children grasp the meaning of what is communicated to them in catechetical meetings? The mystery of the Eucharist cannot be grasped by intellect alone. In his *Great Catechism*, Martin Luther wrote about the sacrament of the altar: “since this treasure is of-

⁹ Quoted in Yves Jeanne, “Désiré Magloire Bourneville, Désiré Magloire Bourneville, rendre leur humanité aux enfants «idiots»”, *Reliance* 24, no 2 (2007): 144-48, <https://doi.org/10.3917/reli.024.0144>.

¹⁰ Henri Bissonnier, *Pédagogie Catéchétique des Enfants Arriérés* (Paris: Fleurus, 1959), 21.

ferred to us by means of words, it cannot be grasped and appropriated except by the heart.”¹¹ If the meaning of the treasure of the Eucharist can only be grasped and appropriated by the heart, it leaves the door wide open for all those who do not understand its meaning by reason. Even for persons who have access to deductive reasoning, there may be aspects of the Eucharist that are hard to wrap one’s head around. Whether one is, like Timothy, deprived of the use of the word, or like me, puzzled by transubstantiation, it is only in the love of our hearts that we can approach this treasure. And indeed, no one can probe our hearts except God.

But there is more: Timothy was never alone when we met. His mother was there, she heard the words exchanged and she told the other members of the family about it. This gives an apostolic dimension to the meetings with Timothy. It is indeed this apostolic dimension that we must look at in our reflection on the ecclesial meaning of the process.

3 Ecclesial Issue: Communicating with the Parish Community

At an ecclesial level, we can say that through the Eucharist, the faithful unite themselves to Christ who makes them partakers of his body and blood to form one Body. Indeed, for the Catholic faithful, the Eucharist signifies and realizes communion of life with God and the unity of the People of God. It is therefore incomprehensible that even today some people with disabilities are still denied access to the Eucharistic table. However, as early as 2007, Pope Benedict XVI wrote: “whenever possible, eucharistic communion should be made available to the mentally handicapped, if they are baptized and confirmed: they receive the Eucharist in the faith also of the family or the community that accompanies them.”¹² This passage is interesting, yet I wonder why Pope Benedict takes the precaution “whenever possible.” Shouldn’t Eucharistic communion be made available “whenever possible” to everyone, regardless of their abilities?

In my opinion, it is exactly this kind of remark that allows some priests to believe that they are authorized to refuse the Eucharist to people with an intellec-

¹¹ Martin Luther, *Oeuvres Tome VII* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1962), 139.

¹² Benedict XVI, “Sacramentum Caritatis, § 58” The Vatican (website), accessed Feb 29, 2020 http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html.

tual disability, as the priest mentioned at the beginning of this article or as witnessed by the meeting of a young girl, Serena, with Pope Francis on June 11, 2016: Serena told the Holy Father how in her parish the priest did not want her to celebrate her First Communion because she was unable to understand the meaning of it. Once again, the priest of this parish seems to limit the understanding of the Eucharist to reason, as if the meaning of this sacrament was reduced to a matter of the intellect, instead of being a matter that needs to be understood by the heart, as Luther wrote. In his reply to Serena, Pope Francis refers to the scandal provoked at the beginning of the 20th century by Pope Pius X's incitement to give the Eucharist to little children. It had been said to Pope Pius X that little children could not understand the meaning of the Eucharist. To which Pius X replied that he knew that children understand in a different way. And Pope Francis continued: "Each of us has a different way of knowing things: one knows in one way, another knows in another, but all of us can know God." And Pope Francis insisted that the Eucharist be for all or for no one ("*o tutti o nessuno*"), which has since become the watchword for those who organize catechetical meetings in Catholic dioceses and parishes throughout the world.

However, Pope Francis' declared willingness to provide catechesis for all has neither removed the difficulties related to the transmission of knowledge to people with intellectual disabilities, nor the questions that this raises for some of the faithful. The question of the meaning to be transmitted remains. Pope Benedict XVI writes that persons with intellectual disabilities receive the Eucharist in the faith of their families and communities. This means that the first Church-cell to whom we have to convey the meaning of our approach is the family of Timothy.

On a Saturday morning, I go to Timothy's house to meet the whole family. We sit around the family table, and Timothy is with us. He looks happy by my side and participates in the session in his own way. I have brought wheat ears and flour. We discover how it takes thousands of grains to make enough flour for one loaf of bread. The children make dough and shape small loaves of bread. I tell them that just like the grains in the bread, it takes the presence of all of us to form the Body of Christ, and how Jesus chooses to join us in this bread to give us the strength of his love. Then each of us draws an ear of wheat with the names of people who love us inside the grains. Timothy's parents help him to realize his drawing. The ears of wheat will find their place on the festive dinner table with Timothy's extended family.

This meeting with Timothy's close relatives was necessary to make sure that they could fulfil their apostolic role and explain the process to the extended family. But Timothy did not celebrate his Communion with his close relatives alone; the celebration took place in the context of a gathered parish community, to whom it was also necessary to explain the meaning of the event. Indeed, some Catholic parishioners might object to what was undertaken here; because according to

Canon Law (can. 913¹³) to be allowed to access Eucharist, it is expected that children have sufficient knowledge and are able to distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food. The question therefore was whether we had been able to communicate the meaning of the Eucharist to Timothy so that he had “sufficient knowledge” of it.

Here we are faced with a tension between the words “communion” and “communication.” These two words have the same etymology, which is *to put in common*. Communication, as the transmission of a meaning of the sacrament, has the vocation of opening to communion with divine life. Too often this transmission of meaning is read only as intellectual understanding and reasonable knowledge. But communication is also the sharing of a common experience of this mystery; good communication makes us grow in humanity. This goes far beyond the transmission of information; it is a sharing of knowledge in the love of Christ. This love is not only shared through words and is not only given in reasonable knowledge. On the contrary, we are here in the order of experience. The sufficient knowledge of which canon law speaks cannot refer to the intellect alone. Knowledge of Christ is always experienced first of all in shared love. And it was indeed through a kiss, symbol of love, that Timothy was able to manifest his sufficient knowledge of Christ.

With regard to his ability to distinguish the Bread of Life from ordinary bread, in Timothy’s case it is very complicated to evaluate this ability. Here again we are obliged to interpret and to trust that God’s grace reaches out to Timothy in the reception of the Sacrament. In any case, to my knowledge, Timothy has never embraced any food other than the Bread of Life.

When I met the parish priest a few weeks after Timothy’s First Communion, he told me that he had not had any negative feedback after the celebration. He had already made the faithful aware of the need to welcome the different other, because among the altar servers there is a young man with a disability who at times behaves erratically, disturbing the serenity of the assembly. Also, the priest had repeatedly said from the pulpit that the vocation of every Christian community is to welcome everyone, regardless of their differences or disabilities. In a 2017 article,¹⁴ Erik Carter emphasizes the importance of preaching for the percep-

13 Can. 913 § 1. The administration of the Most Holy Eucharist to children requires that they have sufficient knowledge and careful preparation so that they understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity and are able to receive the body of Christ with faith and devotion.

14 Erik W. Carter, “From Barriers to Belonging for People with Disabilities: Promising Pathways Toward Inclusive Ministry,” in *Religion, Disability, and Interpersonal Violence* (Springer International Publishing: Switzerland, 2017), *E-Book* accessed August 22, 2017, 25-44, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-56901-7_3

tion of disability by the faithful, because what one hears (or does not hear) from the pulpit has a decisive influence on the community. What priests say about disability in homilies, prayers or readings during a celebration and how they say it, communicates to the congregation how disability should be perceived and whether the community sees itself as incomplete without the presence, gifts and faith of people with disabilities.

Also, for the Diocesan Service for the Pastoral Care of Persons with Disabilities and for myself, it was important that Timothy's parents understood how meaningful their approach was for the whole community. We wanted them to understand that the church community as the Body of Christ was not complete as long as one of us was missing. By admitting Timothy to the Eucharistic table, it was signified – both to him and to the community – that he was considered a full member of that Body. As in Luke's parable, it is only when the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame take part in the feast, that the feast can begin (Lk 14:15–23). Through his presence at the Supper, his happiness at being there and the pride of his family, Timothy is for all a living icon of Christ, crucified and risen.

The expression “living icons of the Crucified Son” as a reference for people with disabilities, comes from John Paul II.¹⁵ I deliberately added the adjective “risen.” Obviously, the crucified Son is *de facto* the risen Son. Still, by limiting the association of disability to the crucified Son, the Pope can be said to perpetuate the prejudice that disability implies only suffering. Without minimizing the complexity of living with a disability, Timothy's life is not just about suffering. The affection he gives and receives is a testimony to the love lived in his presence. Caring for him, allowing him to be fully himself – son, brother, godchild, student, parishioner, Christian – compels all those whom Timothy meets to grow in humanity. Indeed, in the face of Timothy's obvious vulnerability, we are confronted by our own vulnerability. This vulnerability, which is also that of the crucified Son, cannot be dissociated from the unheard-of power of the resurrection (1 Cor 2: 19).

After the celebration of Timothy's First Communion, his mother testifies:

That day was filled with small signs of Grace. Before the celebration, Timothy salivated in an unusual way. It was as if he was telling us, in his own way, that he longed for the Eucharist. In the days that followed, several people told us how moved they were by Timothy's communion. One parishioner told me that our son is now 'Christ's tabernacle.' I liked this expression very much. His godfather wrote him a short text to tell him how being Timothy's godfather taught him to see life differently. Loving Timothy and being loved by Timothy transforms life.

15 John-Paul II, *Message of John Paul II on the Occasion of the International Symposium on the Dignity and Rights of the Mentally Disabled Person*, 2004, § 6.

By allowing those around him to grow in humanity and by transforming the lives of those who come close to him, is Timothy not just as much an icon of the *risen* Son as he is of the *crucified* Son?

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that for Timothy, as for every Catholic faithful, it is important to be able to receive the Eucharist in order that he may deepen his relationship with Christ. Timothy participates fully in the same communion that other faithful can have with God. In fact, there should be nothing “out of the ordinary” in Timothy’s Communion. Of course, the fact that I am devoting a whole article to it shows to what extent this communion remains for the moment “out of the ordinary”. New ways of practice and understanding had to be invented to make this Communion possible and it would be good if what we have implemented with Timothy could be officially recognized as “valid” and “licit.” Timothy is a rare case, but he is not unique. Other people suffer from dysphagia and are in fact unable to receive the body of Christ in the usual way. Some persons on the autistic spectrum are distressed when it comes to eating the host.¹⁶ It seems urgent that the Catholic Church allows pastoral teams a certain flexibility to invent appropriate means in particular situations. Only at this price can we send a message to all the faithful that no one should be excluded from the Lord’s table. Even when communication is complex and complicated, the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life, for all, regardless of ability, “*o tutti o nessuno.*”

¹⁶ Lawrence R. Sutton, *How to Welcome, Include, and Catechize Children with Autism and Other Special Needs: A Parish-Based Approach* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2013), 87-98.