

THE REVERENT RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION
BRIEF BULLETIN ARTICLES
DIOCESE OF MADISON ❖ OFFICE OF WORSHIP

Prepare the way of the Lord

St. John the Baptist was sent to herald the Lord’s coming and to ready a way for the Lord. Each time that we receive Communion at Mass, we need to recall his words, for it gives us an opportunity to remember that God is still with us, most especially in the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. In particular, our preparation includes:

- Prayer, penance, and participation in the Mass
- Fasting from food or drink for one hour, with the exception of water and medication, before the reception of Holy Communion (those who are sick or elderly may be excused from this)
- Making sure hands are clean, if receiving Communion in the hand
- Refraining from chewing gum during Mass (you should never receive Communion when chewing gum)
- If you are aware of committing a grave sin, the Sacrament of Penance (confession) should be celebrated prior to receiving Communion

By doing these things we prepare ourselves spiritually and physically for the reverent reception of the Lord.



Say Amen!

When distributing Communion, the minister says, “The Body of Christ” or “The Blood of Christ.” Our response of “Amen” to these statements is very important. It is a statement of faith—“Yes, I believe” that these elements that look like bread and wine are actually fully and completely transformed (transubstantiated) into the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ.

It is also a pledge or promise. Saint Augustine told his parishioners in one of his homilies, “For you hear the words, ‘the Body of Christ’ and respond ‘Amen.’ Be then a member of the Body of Christ that your ‘Amen’ may be true” (*Sermo 272*). Our “Amen” both states our belief and commits us to become fuller members of the Body of Christ.

So when you receive Communion, take the time to say “Amen.” It is our pledge of faith.



Receiving Communion from the Chalice (Cup)

When the mother of James and John asked Jesus to seat her sons on his right and left in his kingdom, Jesus said in reply, “Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?” (*Matthew 20:20-28*). Immediately before his Passion, Jesus asked his Father to “let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as you will” (*Matthew 26:39*). This cup of suffering is also a cup of blessing (*Psalms 116*), for those who drink the Blood of the New Covenant are reminded that we glory in the cross of Jesus Christ (*Galatians 6:14*).

In recent times, more and more parishes offer Communion under both species. While our belief is that the entire Christ is present in each species individually, the Church reminds us that there is value for us to “Take and eat; take and drink.” No one is required to drink from the cup (or chalice, as it is called in Church documents), but all must remember to be reverent, even if not receiving in this manner.

When receiving from the chalice, remember the following:

- Say “Amen” after the minister says, “The Blood of Christ”
- Drink only a small amount of the consecrated wine; try to make sure that none flows back into the chalice
- You should not dip the host in the chalice (self-intinction) for the Church does not allow this for both theological and practical reasons
- If you are sick or have a suppressed immune system, please refrain from receiving Communion under this form



Bowing at Communion

Before receiving Communion, each person is asked to make “a gesture of reverence,” which is a slight bow of the head. This small gesture invites us to slow down and to think about what we are doing while humbly acknowledging Christ, present in the Eucharist. Since receiving Communion is something that we do every week (or maybe every day), it can become “routine.” Our bow of the head and our response of “Amen” when the minister says “The Body of Christ,” “The Blood of Christ” remind us that this is anything but routine. Jesus Christ—God Made Man—feeds us with his own Body and Blood! We recall his Passion and remember that God is not relegated to the past, but walks with us each and every day.



Communion Thanksgiving

After Communion, liturgical books call for a brief period of thanksgiving. This may take the form of a hymn, psalm, a song of praise, or silent prayer. It is time for all to offer thanks and praise for the Eucharist. Following this brief time for prayer, all rise for the prayer after Communion. The priest gathers together all of our sung or silent prayer and together we ask God to strengthen us through our sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ.



The Eucharist and the Poor

On the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi), Pope Benedict XVI referred to the Eucharist as “a school of charity and solidarity,” adding, “Those who nourish themselves on the bread of Christ cannot remain indifferent before people who, even in our own time, are without daily bread...May the Feast of Corpus Christi be an occasion to increase this authentic concern for our brothers and sisters, especially the poor” (*Angelus, May 25, 2008*).

Christ gave us the two Great Commandments: to love God with all our hearts, souls and minds, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. This love isn't a *feeling* but rather a *commitment*. Blessed Mother Teresa spoke eloquently of this love: “If we really understand the Eucharist, if we really center our lives on Jesus' Body and Blood, if we nourish our lives with the Bread of the Eucharist, it will be easy for us to see Christ in that hungry one next door, the one lying in the gutter, the alcoholic man we shun, our husband or our wife, or our restless child. For in them, we will recognize the distressing disguises of the poor: Jesus in our midst.”



Eucharistic Adoration

Regular prayer before the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass offers individuals the opportunity to reflect more deeply on the profound and sacred mysteries that are celebrated in the Mass. Such prayer is an expression of gratitude, love, and adoration toward Christ. It is one way that Catholics may prepare themselves for the celebration of Mass, the reception of Holy Communion, and a life of service to God and one another.

Pope Benedict XVI wrote, “In the Eucharist, the Son of God comes to meet us and desires to become one with us; Eucharistic adoration is simply the natural consequence of the Eucharistic celebration, which is itself the Church's supreme act of adoration. Receiving the Eucharist means adoring him whom we receive. Only in this way do we become one with him, and are given, as it were, a foretaste of the beauty of the heavenly liturgy. The act of adoration outside Mass prolongs and intensifies all that takes place during the liturgical celebration itself” (*Sacrament of Charity*, 2007).



Communion Reminders

Pope Benedict XVI recently reminded Catholics that Christ “became our food in order to give us life, his own divine life” (*Angelus*, May 25, 2008). As we receive Communion, there are things that we can do to remind ourselves of the great dignity and importance of this gift:

- Participate fully in the Mass
- If you are aware of committing a grave sin, the Sacrament of Penance (confession) should be celebrated prior to receiving Communion; also try to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance regularly, at least once each year
- Fast from food or drink for one hour, with the exception of water and medication, before the reception of Holy Communion (those who are sick or elderly may be excused from this)
- Before receiving Communion, bow your head slightly as an acknowledgment of Christ’s real presence in the Sacrament
- Respond, “Amen” when the Communion minister says, “The Body (or Blood) of Christ.” Your “Amen” is a statement of faith in Christ’s presence in the Sacrament as well as your own commitment to be a full member of His Body
- Consume the consecrated host immediately upon receiving it in the presence of the minister, just as you do with the consecrated wine
- Offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God after receiving Communion

