

This Life-giving Bread

This Saving Cup



The Reverent Reception of Holy Communion

“Take this, all of you, and eat it . . . Take this, all of you, and drink from it.” We hear these words each time we go to Mass, yet it is hard to find the time to reflect on them. The reflections below are designed for all to renew their participation in the Mass, deepen their love of the Eucharist, and enhance the effects of Communion in their daily lives.

Preparation for Communion

We prepare ourselves for Communion in a number of ways. Some things—like fasting for at least an hour before Communion—are relatively easy for most people. Others—like examining our consciences—are more difficult. The documents of the Second Vatican Council remind us that any time we participate in the liturgy, we are to come with proper dispositions so that the celebration may have the greatest possible effect on us (see *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 11).

Fasting: Fasting—even for a brief time—not only makes us hunger for food and drink, it helps us purify ourselves, turning our minds and hearts to God. According to the *Code of Canon Law*, Catholics must fast for at least one hour before Holy Communion (with the exception of water and medication).

Reconciliation: Our participation in the Eucharist strengthens us to avoid sin and live a life more like Christ, whose Body and Blood we receive. Before going to Communion, we ask God to “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” We also share a sign of Christ’s peace with one another. Part of our immediate preparation for Communion involves reconciling ourselves to God and neighbor. If a person is aware of serious sin, the Sacrament of Reconciliation should be celebrated before receiving Communion.

Participation in Mass: As part of our own preparation, we are called to participate fully, consciously, and actively in the Mass. This kind of participation is not half-hearted. It demands that

we pray with the whole heart, mind, spirit, and body. We listen carefully to the readings and prayers, concentrate on the words that we say and sing, and prepare a place in our hearts for Christ to enter.

Receiving the Body & Blood of Christ

The Church “warmly recommends” that Catholics who have prepared themselves in the manner described above receive Communion each time that they participate in the Mass (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1388). As Catholics, we believe that Christ is truly present under each of the species (bread and wine). However, “Holy Communion has a more complete form as a sign when it is received under both kinds” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 281).

The Communion Procession: In order to receive Communion, we normally leave our pew and *process* to the front of the church. We don’t do this because it is the easiest way to receive Communion. We process towards the altar not as a group of individuals but as a community of believers—the Body of Christ. We participate in song to signify the unity of our hearts through the union of our voices. The simple act of leaving the pew and joining the procession is part of our participation in the Body and Blood of Christ.

Posture and Signs of Reverence: In the revised *General Instruction of the Roman Missal [GIRM]* it is stated that the normal posture for receiving Communion in the United States is standing (see GIRM no. 160). In addition, all are asked to bow the head before the Sacrament as a gesture of reverence prior to receiving the Body and the Blood of the Lord. For many of us, this gesture of reverence is something new. It reminds us that reception of Holy Communion is not something that we undertake lightly, nor is it something that we do without thought.

Receiving the Body of Christ: There are two ways to receive the Body of Christ. Communi-

cants may place one hand (with the palm up) on the other, holding them both out as they approach the minister. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem called this “making a throne for Christ the King.” The communicant bows the head slightly in reverence before the Sacrament, as described above.

As the minister holds up the host, he or she says “The Body of Christ,” to which the communicant responds, “Amen.” The host is placed in the top hand. The communicant should take a short step to the side and briefly stop, taking the host with the bottom hand and placing it in his or her mouth before returning to the pew. (Out of respect for the Eucharist, cleanliness of hands is expected.)

Instead of this method, the communicant may approach with hands folded. After the sign of reverence and the dialogue described above takes place between minister and communicant, the communicant opens his or her mouth so that the minister can place the host on the tongue.

The communicant is free to choose whether or not to receive “in the hand” or “on the tongue.”

Receiving the Blood of Christ: After receiving the Body of Christ, the communicant approaches a minister with the Blood of Christ and stands before him or her and bows the head before the Sacrament (as described above). The minister holds the cup and says, “The Blood of Christ.” After responding, “Amen,” the communicant carefully drinks from the cup. When finished, the cup is handed back to the minister and the communicant returns to his or her seat. The minister then wipes the cup with a purificator and turns it slightly.

In some places, a practice has developed in which communicants dip their own host into the cup (“intinction”). This is not permitted by universal Church law, and is not the proper way to receive the Blood of Christ for several reasons. As Catholics, we normally *receive* Communion from a minister, rather than *take* Communion by ourselves. In addition, this increases the risk that the consecrated wine may drip onto the floor. Finally, while the minister can wipe the cup after each person drinks to assist with proper hygiene, there is nothing that can be done for hygienic purposes after fingers have been dipped in the chalice.

Say “Amen” to what you are

Our response of “Amen” when we hear “The Body of Christ” and “The Blood of Christ” is a statement of faith. “Yes! We believe” that this is the Body and Blood of Christ. Saint Augustine took this a step further 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” commits us to become fuller members of the Body of Christ.

A Communion Thanksgiving

After Communion, it is appropriate to spend time in prayer. 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. Together we ask God to strengthen us through our sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ.

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.

Become the Body of Christ

The Eucharist always strengthens and unites the Church. Our eating and drinking of the Body and Blood of Christ strengthens us to become more like Christ: serving the poor, uniting the Church, performing works of charity and mercy, praying for others. Communion does not simply end when we return to our seats. Remember the words of Saint Augustine: “Be then, a member of the Body of Christ, that your ‘Amen’ may be true.”

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