

12/17/23 - The celebration of the Eucharist: *How should I receive the Eucharist?*

The last reflection in this section considers the way in which we should receive Holy Communion, recognizing again the communal nature of the Liturgy and our own disposition as we enter the sacred mysteries. It can often happen that questions arise regarding the way we receive Holy Communion, especially for parents as they teach their children. So it's important to know the beautiful theological and spiritual foundations for both our disposition and our actions when receiving Holy Communion. Here, the United State Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) have provided helpful guidance for us, so that as individuals and as a community, our reception of Holy Communion can be at all times reverent and joyful.

The guidance from the Bishops highlights first the richness of the procession which initiates the distribution of Holy Communion. The document states: "The Church understands the Communion Procession, in fact every procession in liturgy, as a sign of the pilgrim Church, the body of those who believe in Christ, on their way to the Heavenly Jerusalem. ...When we move in procession, particularly the procession to receive the Body and Blood of Christ in Communion, we are a sign, a symbol of that pilgrim Church "on the way." This liturgical movement is so much more than just a standard line, something we are all used to in stores, markets, and offices. Rather, our movement here is a spiritual movement that reminds us that together, we approach *someone*, Jesus Christ, and the Heavenly Jerusalem. That should draw our hearts and minds to a special place of reverence, joy, and awe.

"The fact that the Communion Procession is a profoundly religious action tells us something about the way in which we should participate in this procession. We are the Body of Christ, moving forward to receive the Christ who makes us one with himself and with one another. Our procession should move with dignity; our bearing should be that of those who know they have been redeemed by Christ and are coming to receive their God!" This movement, then, places us within a family which moves together, and while each individual receives Holy Communion, the movement is one that is filled with dignity, reverence, joy, and unity.

The guiding document for the way in which we are to celebrate the Liturgy is called the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. The “*General Instruction* asks each country's Conference of Bishops to determine the posture to be used for the reception of Communion and the act of reverence to be made by each person as he or she receives Communion. In the United States, the Conference of Bishops has determined that ‘[t]he norm... is that Holy Communion is to be received standing, unless an individual member of the faithful wishes to receive Communion while kneeling’ and that a bow is the act of reverence made by those receiving. Those who receive Communion may receive either in the hand or on the tongue, and the decision should be that of the individual receiving, not of the person distributing Communion.”

In all cases, the disposition of the one receiving should be marked by a deep faith and belief in who we are receiving, and that we express the appropriate reverence, understanding, and joy when receiving. I mention those words because reverence acknowledges the awe we should have and the respect we should have as we prepare to receive Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. The word understanding reminds us that we should be conscious and aware of who we are receiving. And there should also be joy, because joy is a manifestation of faith, a faith that directs our minds and hearts to the glory of God and His immense love and mercy as He offers Himself to us.

What reverence do I have towards the reception of Communion?

Even as I stand in line to receive, what is my disposition?

Am I having a conversation with the Lord about receiving Him?

As we end this series of reflections on how we celebrate and receive the Eucharist, reflect on your own belief and experiences with the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Conduct an examination of conscience asking yourself...

Do I prepare to receive the Lord?

Do I keep holy the sabbath?

Do I believe in the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist?

Am I aware of any impediments to me receiving the Lord?

If anything is revealed to you during the examination of conscience, make a point to go to Confession. Seek the graces and mercy of God for those areas on your heart where you are most need of God's forgiveness.

Resources

For additional reading, please see the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

To prepare for the worthy reception of this sacrament, the faithful should observe the fast required in their Church. Bodily demeanor (gestures, clothing) ought to convey the respect, solemnity, and joy of this moment when Christ becomes our guest.

Also, both Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI reaffirmed the teaching from the Catechism that "anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion".

Finally, "since Christ is sacramentally present under each of the species, communion under the species of bread alone makes it possible to receive all the fruit of Eucharistic grace. But "the sign of communion is more complete when given under both kinds, since in that form the sign of the Eucharistic meal appears more clearly."