

## RECEIVING COMMUNION

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Based on my own observations and in response to comments and queries brought to my attention, I would like to address some of the practices in relation to the ministering and receiving of Holy Communion that apply in the Diocese. As we celebrate the Solemnity of The Body and Blood of Christ and celebrate Eucharist frequently, that we may do so worthily and immersed as fully as possible in this Mystery and Sacrament. There is so much about Eucharist that we can and ought to elaborate upon but on this occasion, I want to offer a few thoughts on the manner and method with which we approach our God to receive his Son Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

### The Method of Receiving Communion

Communion can be received on the tongue or in the hand. One way is not better than the other, both methods of receiving are strong in the tradition of the faith and the choice of method is entirely up to the person receiving the sacrament. What matters most is that in giving and receiving communion, the right disposition of heart and mind and the greatest care and deepest respect for the sacred species be at all times observed.

During the period when we were required to comply with protocols associated with the Covid virus, it was mandatory to receive communion in the hand in order to minimize the contact between the minister and the person receiving communion. It happens sometimes, unintentionally and inadvertently, that when giving communion on the tongue or in the hand, the minister touches the person. We still need to keep these things in mind as we are not yet fully free from the Covid virus and there are other pathogens that can be transferred from one person to another through touching the tongue or hand.

What would be essential for a smooth flow and to minimize any mishaps in the distribution of communion, is if we all participate in this exchange as best as we can: with good understanding, with due reverence and with careful and deliberate participation. When we stand before the minister to receive communion it is important that the person receiving indicates clearly to the minister the way in which he/she wishes to receive the sacrament. If the choice to receive on the tongue, then at the words "Body of Christ" they should clearly respond "Amen" then, keeping their hands together in front of them, they should open their mouth and extend their tongue sufficiently to receive the host keeping as still as possible while the minister places the host on their tongue. The person, having received communion, then steps aside and proceeds to their place to allow the next person in line to approach the minister.

Accidents tend to occur if a) the person receiving communion opens their mouth only slightly expecting the minister to insert the host in the mouth or b) when they attempt to say "Amen" or bow while the minister is attempting to place the host on the tongue or c) When they move their head forward (even lunge forward) to receive the host.

If the person chooses to receive on the hand, and is right-handed, then, when the minister says "Body of Christ" the left hand should rest upon the right hand with both hands held flat and extended towards the minister as they respond "Amen" keeping their hands still. The host will then be laid in the palm of the left hand by the minister and the person receiving communion first steps aside then uses their right hand to take the host from the left hand and place it in their mouth. The person receiving should then check if any fragments (crumbs) remain on the hand and if so to carefully retrieve and consume them. If one is left-handed the above applies interchanging the words left and right. It is not appropriate to reach out and take the host from the Minister using their first finger and thumb.

For those who join the Communion procession to receive a blessing they should indicate this to the minister by crossing their forearms across their chest.

### Preparation to Receive the Eucharist

The proximate preparation for receiving communion during Mass or service begins with the recitation of the Our Father followed by the sign of peace and Lamb of God. Those intending to participate in Eucharist then join the communion procession to approach the minister. The procession is not a "waiting line" similar to those we join at the supermarket or the bank, or to receive our pension or get attention at the clinic.

*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. The liturgical assembly of the baptized that comes together for the celebration of the Eucharist is a witness to, and a manifestation of, the pilgrim Church. 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." The Communion Procession is an action of the Body of Christ. At Christ's invitation, extended by the priest acting in Christ's person: "Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb," the members of the community move forward to share in the sacred meal, to receive the Body and Blood of Christ which is the sign and the source of their unity. In fact, each time we move forward together to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord, we join the countless ranks of all the baptized who have gone before us, our loved ones, the canonized and uncanonized saints down through the ages, who at their time in history formed a part of this mighty stream of believers. (USCCB).*

This is the spirit in which we can best participate in this proximate preparation to receiving the Body of Christ; in communion with others, in prayer, with desire, focused, joining in the communion processional hymn until we reach the Minister. It is not necessary to bow, or genuflect, or make a sign of the cross just before receiving. We ought to have adequately disposed ourselves to receive Christ in the Eucharist through recitation of the Our Father, sign of peace, lamb of God and processing. If one's personal devotion prompts them to make an additional gesture of reverence, such as a sign of the Cross, genuflection, bow, then these may be best done while the person immediately in front of them is receiving communion. As their turn comes, they can right away indicate to the minister how they wish to receive the sacrament. A smooth flow of the Communion Procession helps the overall reverence and solemnity of the liturgy of the Eucharist. As persons return to their seats they are encouraged to sit or kneel quietly in prayer.

I offer these few words in the hope of bringing some clarity and guidance to the faith communities in the Diocese. The gathering of the faithful for the Sunday Liturgy is where we see the greatest participation of God's people, the Body of Christ, in celebration and witness of the faith. Receiving the Eucharist is the centre and summit of this special communal worship and we want to do this in the most fitting manner deeply conscious of the mystery to which we are given access, a mystery we are called to and privileged to live, a mystery to make our own and share with others "following the example of Jesus Christ in whose name" we gather and pray and serve and witness.

Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

2nd June 2024