

Welcoming the ROMAN MISSAL THIRD EDITION

Deepen, Nurture, Celebrate

The Reception of Holy Communion at Mass



The Church understands the Communion Procession – indeed every procession in liturgy – as a sign of the pilgrim Church on the way to the Heavenly Jerusalem. All our lives, we who believe in Christ are moving in time toward that moment when we will be taken by death from this world and enter into the joy of the Lord in the eternal Kingdom he has prepared for us.

The community of believers that comes together to celebrate the Eucharist is a witness to, 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.' For some, however, the experience of the Communion Procession is more analogous to standing on line. An unfortunate perception such as this is an impoverished understanding of what is a significant religious action.

The Communion Procession is an action of the Body of Christ. At Christ's invitation, extended by the priest acting in Christ's person – *Happy are they who are called to his supper* – 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 saints down through the ages, who at their time in history formed a part of this mighty stream of believers.

This action by Christ's body, the Church assembled for the Eucharist, is manifested and supported by the Communion Hymn, a hymn in praise of Christ sung by the united voices of those who believe in him and share his life. For some, however, the singing of this hymn is perceived as an intrusion on their own prayer, their private thanksgiving after Communion. In fact, this hymn is our prayer, the corporate thanksgiving prayer of the members of Christ's Body, united with one another. The prayers of the liturgy emphasize this fundamental concept of the unity of the baptized, stressing that when we come together to participate in the Eucharistic celebration we come, not as individuals, but as united members of Christ's body. In the Eucharistic Prayer, God is asked to send his Holy Spirit to make us one body, one spirit in Christ.

It is difficult for some to embrace this emphasis on Mass as the action of a community rather than an individual act of faith and piety, but it is important that we make every effort to do so. Baptism has joined us to Christ and to one another as the vine and its branches. The life of Christ, the Holy Spirit, animates each of us individually, and all of us corporately and guides us together in our efforts to become one in Christ.

The fact that the Communion Procession is a profoundly religious action tells us 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!

The Conference of Bishops of the United States has determined that in this country Communion will be received standing and that a bow will be the act of reverence made by those receiving. The significance of unity in posture and gesture as a symbol of our unity as members of the one body of Christ should govern our actions.

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. If Communion is received in the hand, the hands should first of all be clean. If one is right handed the left hand should rest upon the right. The host will be placed in the palm of the left hand and then taken by the right hand to the mouth. If one is left-handed this is reversed. It is not appropriate to reach out with the fingers and take the host from the person distributing. When one receives from the chalice, it is never permissible to dip the host one has received into the chalice. If, for some reason, the communicant is not able or willing to drink from the cup then that person should receive only the sacred body.

The person distributing Communion says audibly to each person approaching, *'The Body of Christ'* or *'The Blood of Christ.'* This formula is a proclamation which calls for a response of faith on the part of the one who receives. The communicant should audibly respond *'Amen,'* indicating by that response his or her belief that this bread and the wine in the chalice are in reality the body and blood of Christ the Lord.

In Baptism we have been called to form but one body. The Eucharist fulfills this call. ***"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."*** (1 Corinthians 10:16, 17)

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