

The Year of Faith

Catechesis on the Mass

The Proper Reception of Holy Communion

This week in our catechesis on the Mass we cover the proper reception of Holy Communion.

After the priest and the various ministers receive Holy Communion, the people approach in procession to communicate. We should remember that is a solemn liturgical procession, which is why it is accompanied by music in the form of the Communion Chant. Our body posture should be solemn and reverent during the entire movement to and from our seat. Conversation of any type is scandalously inappropriate, since our entire focus must be on the great mystery which we receive. “When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the Sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister” (GIRM 160).

The universal practice for receiving the sacred host is to receive on the tongue. When receiving on the tongue, we answer “Amen,” open our mouth, and extend our tongue fully to provide a flat surface for the Host to be placed upon on our tongue. We should not be moving at all for any reason until the minister retracts his hand. All too often communicants never stop moving, rush off too quickly, attempt to bite or lick or the finger of the minister, or fail to provide a fully open mouth and extended tongue.

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In several places throughout the world, including the United States of America, the host may be received in the hand. In this case, it is important to place our hands correctly. For someone who is right handed, the left hand is held flat and palm up with the right hand underneath. After answering “Amen,” the host is placed in the hand on top and the dominant hand comes from underneath to pick up the host and to place it in the mouth. The communicant must be cautious lest any fragments be lost. Once again, all too often communicants fail to remain still as the host is given. Furthermore, Communion should not be received in the hand if the use of both hands is not available or if there is any risk of the host being dropped, for example due to illness, disability, or age of the communicant. Should the minister believe that there is any risk of profanation the host is to be placed on the tongue instead.

At various times, Holy Communion may be offered under both species. When receiving the Precious Blood, we once again bow our heads. The chalice should be handled reverently and carefully and a small amount of Precious Blood should be sipped from the chalice carefully so as to prevent the loss of even the smallest droplet.

Finally, “[t]he norm established for the Dioceses of the United States of America is that Holy Communion is to be received standing, unless an individual member of the faithful wishes to receive Communion while kneeling” (GIRM 160).

Next week, we cover the ablutions and Prayer after Communion.

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