

the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship in 1980, is as follows:

“With regard to the manner of going to communion, the faithful can receive it either kneeling or standing, in accordance with the norms laid down by the episcopal conference: When the faithful communicate kneeling, no other sign of reverence towards the Blessed Sacrament is required, since kneeling is itself a sign of adoration.

“When they receive communion standing, it is strongly recommended that, coming up in procession, they should make a sign of reverence before receiving the Blessed Sacrament. This should be done at the right time and place, so that the order of people going to and from communion should not be disrupted.”(1) Receiving Communion

Once you arrive at the sanctuary to receive Communion, it depends, of course, on how the church is designed, whether you kneel at the altar rail to receive, or receive standing. I would like emphasize that it is the right of the laity to receive either standing or kneeling.

In what manner do we receive Him in the Eucharist? Are we truly conscious of who we are about to receive when we approach the priest for communion? Is our mind focused on what we are about to experience or are we distracted by thoughts that have little or no bearing on Jesus?

In certain dioceses today, bishops recommend that for the sake of unanimity we should receive our Lord in the hand, while standing. Personally, I receive on the tongue while kneeling. Either way, what is truly important is our submission before God at that time.

The optional practice of receiving Communion in the hand was voted on favorably by the Bishops in the United States and approved by the Congregation for Divine Worship in 1977. In all cases the practice is an option, the communicant’s personal choice.

Should Communion be given by intinction, it may not be given in the hand, nor may the communicant dip the Host into the chalice.

Communion on the tongue is the universal norm, but if you should desire to receive Communion-in-the-Hand please do it in the proper manner. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on the Liturgy produced a pamphlet in 1977 entitled *The Body of Christ*, which describes the proper method of receiving communion in the hand.

“You are always free to receive communion on the tongue, but if you should decide to receive in the hand, you should approach the minister of the Eucharist with one hand resting on the other, palm up (ordinarily the left hand uppermost) extended toward the minister. You ought to have your hands uncovered, with no objects in them. Your

hands should be extended sufficiently outward and upward so it will be evident that you wish to receive the consecrated bread in your hand. The minister will then place the sacred host in your extended hand after the usual words: “The Body of Christ,” and your customary response, “Amen.” Once the minister has placed the consecrated bread in your hand, step to one side and immediately place the host in your mouth. Only then should you move to receive from the cup (if the consecrated wine is offered) or return to one’s place.”(2)

When you are about to receive Communion, you should keep your eyes fixed lovingly on the Sacred Host. The general custom of closing the eyes when about to receive is said to be based on reverence for our Lord. But why should it be irreverent to see and adore the Body and Blood of Christ, and to acknowledge Him with our eyes? It is no more irreverent to look at the Sacred Host when presented to us at that moment than at the moment of consecration or during exposition.

Here on earth we see God, “For now we see in a mirror dimly,” as St. Paul expresses it. But in heaven we shall see Him “face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12). We ought to accustom ourselves to look upon Him now hidden under the Sacred Species, while we wait for the time when we shall see Him as He truly is.

You are about to receive the living God Himself. Be on your guard, therefore, against any lack of reverence. Those who are ordained are the only ones who can take the Holy Eucharist. Those who are not ordained *receive* the Eucharist; they never *take* it. Don’t reach for it; wait until the Body of Christ is given to you. And take to heart the words of the centurion: “Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.”

1. Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, No. 34, *Vatican Council II: Conciliar and Post Conciliar Document* (Vol. 1), p. 122; Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, *Inaestimabile donum*, No. 11, *Vatican Council II: Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Vol. 1), p. 96.
2. *The Body of Christ*, Bishops Committee on the Liturgy, Section 3, C, 2.

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Eucharistic Etiquette

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Heaven had been closed for generation upon generation, and it is though God could not stand the separation any longer. As fathers glory in their offspring, God too longed to gather His children about Him, so He became man.

Jesus, the second person of the most holy Trinity, desired to show the extent of His love for mankind. Each and every soul is of incalculable value to Him. So much so that He was willing to manifest Himself as one of us in order to pay the price for Adam’s sin, and reconcile mankind to His Father in heaven. His life, death, and resurrection is a testament to His love for each and every human person. There is no possible way for our finite minds to fully understand the depth or extent of His sacrifice?

The only way by which we can even attempt to show the depth of our appreciation is by proper worship.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes the Mass as the “source and summit of Christian life.” As such, each and every part of the Mass has been specifically outlined by the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments in Rome, and the USCCB. It is my opinion that we, as laity, should be able to go anywhere in the country and find the Mass celebrated precisely in accordance with these directives. Unfortunately, this is not always the case.

We are living in a time when the majesty of the Mass is not always properly understood, much less appreciated. It is not uncommon to find a lack of respect for the sanctity of God’s house and most importantly for His Eucharistic Presence. I do not say that this is done deliberately; most often, it is done out of ignorance. There is much confusion among us as to how the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is to be celebrated. We as Catholics have an obligation to learn our part in the Eucharistic celebration, in order to heighten our own participation, but even more importantly, to show proper respect and worship to Our Father in heaven.

A Catholic church is not a mere building or meetinghouse, nor a platform or pulpit; it is a temple in which there is an altar. The altar is erected for sacrifice, the church is built as a sacred dwelling for the altar and for the celebration of Mass; the priest is consecrated for the service of the Mass, and Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, dwells in person in the tabernacle as a consequence of the Mass.

A Catholic church is also a holy refuge, a place where one can be in God’s presence in a most special way. It is a place where we can speak to God intimately in the quiet of

our hearts, and when we listen, a place where He can and will speak to us.

Active Participation

A number of Church documents concerning the Eucharistic celebration speak of the ideal of “Active participation”. What does the term “Active participation” mean?

Well first of all, it means interior participation; in other words, entering into the liturgical celebration with a sense of expectancy, – with the anticipation of a child about to experience something wonderful and majestic. It means that your mind and heart are awake and alert. Secondly, active participation involves the physical action of standing, sitting, kneeling, walking, talking, and possibly even singing. There has to be a sense of unity between the interior and exterior participation in order to worship properly.

Active participation should be both serious and meticulous. Some may say that following liturgical norms inhibits active participation and fosters rigidity or formalism. Obviously, formalism in the strictest sense should be avoided, as it is empty, in and of itself. At the same time, we should be aware of each and every word or action in order to cross the threshold into the Divine mystery.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, celebrated correctly, and entered into fully is the most sublime experience imaginable. Here we are instructed on the Word of God, contained in the Scriptures and Sacred Tradition of the Church. Christ, the Son of the Living God and the Second Person of the Trinity, allows Himself to be summoned from His throne on high in heaven. By the power given to our priests at the time of their ordination, God manifests Himself in the accidents of bread and wine. Why? Because the Word desires intimacy with His people; an intimacy so profound as to defy description or explanation.

Full participation includes Holy Communion and living a Christian life, day to day. In each of the four Gospels, Jesus, himself, commands his disciples to consume his flesh and blood (see Jn 6.53-58; cf. Mt 26.26-28, Mk 14.22-25, Lk 22.17-19). By receiving Jesus sacramentally, we perfect our communion with God and one another, and this growth of charity is the proper benefit to seek from participation in the Eucharist. Thus, it is appropriate that all Catholics, who are properly prepared, receive Holy Communion whenever we participate in the Mass.

Preparing for Mass

Germain Grisez in his *Living a Christian Life* asks: What is one’s chief responsibility in regard to worship? He

answers this question by saying: One should participate devoutly in the Eucharist.

“Reverent participation,” he says, “respects the holiness of the Eucharist. While an excessively formal attitude of reverence and awe toward the sacrifice of the Mass and the reception of Communion might reflect and foster inappropriate fear of God and self-depreciation, a casual attitude of relaxed informality during the Eucharist can reflect and foster forgetfulness of God’s holiness and a lack of humility before him. Therefore, appropriate behavior is important in order to manifest and foster the reverence due the Holy Sacrifice and Holy Communion.”

In other words, there should be a balance between proper fear of the Lord and proper worship of the Lord. One’s attitude toward Mass should be one of positive, rather than anxious, anticipation.

Eucharistic Fast

Whatever deserves doing at all, deserves doing well. If there is any act, which calls for serious preparation, it certainly is the reception of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.

For the worthy reception and fruitful Communion, two dispositions are necessary: those of the soul and those of the body; because Communion is the food of the soul through the body. Both should be fit to receive our Lord.

From the physical standpoint, two things are required: The eucharistic fast, and a modest and reverent exterior.

The precept (positive law) to observe the eucharistic fast is a serious obligation founded in the tradition of the Church and based upon due reverence for the Blessed Sacrament. In the context of contemporary legislation very slight violations with regard to the quantity of food or drink or to the time element (unless done out of deliberate irreverence or of contempt) are not serious sins and thus of themselves do not preclude the reception of Communion.

The eucharistic fast was formerly much stricter. At the present time the Code of Canon Law requires:

“One who is to receive the Most Holy Eucharist is to abstain from any food or drink, with the exception only of water and medicine, for at least the period of one hour before Holy Communion” (Can. 919). “Those who are advanced in age or who suffer from any infirmity, as well as those who take care of them, can receive the Most Holy Eucharist even if they have taken something during the previous hour” (Can 919 §3).

By requiring this slight mortification, the Church wishes to invite us to make an effort, a sacrifice, and to teach us that

spiritual food ought to come before material food. Is not Jesus more important? We should seek Him before anything else.

The purpose of this reminder of the penitential aspect of the eucharistic fast is to bring home again to the communicant the full significance of the Eucharistic Mystery celebrated in memory of Christ’s passion.

The Real Presence

There are no words that can convey the majesty of the Real Presence of Jesus, Lord and Savior, in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. It is understandable that Protestants, who have been taught that communion is simply a reenactment of the Last Supper, would not have any great appreciation of the extraordinary gift that Jesus offers us. God incarnate becomes vulnerable to degradation and humiliation by allowing Himself to be present in the most humble of species; bread and wine. Further, He allows himself to be consumed by His creation. The mystery of mysteries is why? Who is man, that the creator of the universe should debase Himself in such a manner?

Walking up to receive Holy Communion

Walk with dignity with your hands held in a position of prayer at your breast. Pay attention to what you are about to experience. Concentrate and focus your mind and heart on the fact that you are about to receive our Lord in a most extraordinary way. Msgr. Romano Guardini, wrote a wonderful book entitled *Meditations before Mass*, (now published by Sophia Institute Press under the title: *Preparing yourself for Mass*), which I strongly recommend.

In his book, Msgr. Guardini addresses this question also:

“How many really know how to walk with dignity, to process? It is not a hurried or rushed movement, but one that is composed. It is not a lazy shuffle but a virile motion forward. The one who processes walks with agile step; he doesn’t drag his feet. He walks upright, not slouched over. This is not an embarrassed or uncertain motion, but one of confident balance and poise.”

Remember, sooner or later, you will be attending your last Mass and receive our Lord in the Holy Eucharist for the last time. Let it be experienced without distraction or preoccupation as “food for the journey”.

Adoration of the Eucharist

While the Church requires certain acts of reverence as adoration to the Eucharist, she also recommends others. An act of reverence, immediately before receiving Holy Communion, which has been “strongly recommended” by the Sacred Congregation of Rites in 1967 and repeated by