



Celebrating the Sacred Liturgy of the Mass: A Review of New Diocesan Norms—Part VI

In praying the *Great Amen*, the Eucharistic Prayer is concluded and the liturgy proceeds to the Communion Rite, the culmination of the sacrificial meal of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. The Communion Rite begins with the priest's invitation to all the faithful to join together in the prayer Jesus himself taught us: The *Our Father*.

As we join together in saying or singing the *Our Father*, we join with followers of Christ throughout the centuries who have prayed in the words which Jesus taught to his apostles. Although it has become common in some parishes for people to join hands during the *Our Father*, this gesture is not in the Tradition of the Church. Our reception of Holy Communion is the true sign of our unity as the Body of Christ.

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

Because the *Our Father* is so familiar to us, we may sometimes fail to reflect on how fitting the words are to prepare to receive Holy Communion. As we pray for our “daily bread,” we pray not only for food for our bodies, but also for the unsurpassable gift of God's own Son, the Bread of Heaven. We also pray that we have the proper disposition for the reception of Holy Communion as we ask God to “forgive us our trespasses” and in turn for the help to forgive one another.

We pray for freedom from sin in the priest's prayer: “Deliver us, Lord”. This prayer echoes the words of St. Paul to Titus (2:13) and turns our thoughts heavenward “as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.” The assembly responds with the *Doxology*: “For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and for ever.”

The priest then prays that Jesus will not look

on our sins, but on the faith of the Church and give us peace. The priest extends a greeting of peace to all and then either the priest (or deacon) may invite us to share a sign of the Lord's peace with one another. This gesture signifies our reconciliation with God and one another. It should also be a sign of committing ourselves to work for God's peace to reign in both individual hearts and in communities. We offer a handshake, embrace, or simple nod and a greeting of peace, according to local custom. This is not a time to exchange social greetings and casual good wishes.

Body of Christ, Broken for Us

As the singing of the *Agnus Dei* (*Lamb of God*) begins, the priest breaks the Sacred Host, the Sacred Body of Christ which was broken on the cross for us. After the host has been broken, a fragment is placed in the chalice containing the Precious Blood, in keeping with the an ancient tradition.

At the conclusion of the *Lamb of God* we kneel in adoration before the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist in our final preparation for our reception of Holy Communion. The priest genuflects and then holds the Sacred Host slightly over the paten (or chalice) as he says, “This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Happy are those who are called to his supper.” Conscious that we are never worthy of the gift of Holy Communion, we pray with the priest: “Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.”

The Communion hymn (or antiphon), begins while the principal celebrant receives Holy Communion. As stated in our Diocesan General Norms for the Sacred Liturgy of the Mass, this hymn in praise of God for his sacred gift also serves “to demonstrate a communion of spirit

among the communicants through a unity of voices, to show joy of heart, and to highlight more clearly the communitarian nature of the communion procession.” As we process forward it is important to keep in mind that no one “takes” Holy Communion. The Body and Blood of Christ are God’s gift to us—a gift we can only receive with gratitude, humility, and awe.

The Invitation of Jesus

When we receive the sacred gift of Christ’s Body and Blood, we respond to Christ’s desire to be one with us and our Eucharistic celebration is most complete. Those who are unable to receive Holy Communion are encouraged to seek spiritual communion with the Lord at this time.

The teaching of the Church is that Christ is fully present, Body and Blood, in each of the sacred species of bread or of wine.

Those who, for whatever reason, only receive Holy Communion in either the Sacred Body or the Precious Blood, still receive the full reality of Christ’s presence.

Standing is our normative posture for the reception of Holy Communion in the United States (although no one is ever to be denied Holy Communion because they kneel). Before we receive the Holy Eucharist, either in the hand or on the tongue, we bow before the sacrament as a sign of reverence. We profess our faith in the real presence with

our “Amen” as the Body and Blood of Christ are offered to us.

A Time of Profound Reverence

The time of receiving Holy Communion is a very sacred time. Once we have received

Holy Communion, we should return to our place in the assembly reverently. As a sign of our unity, we are invited to stand and sing the Communion hymn until all have received Holy Communion. Those who individually desire, and those with need, may sit or kneel.

When the distribution of Communion is completed, the Communion hymn or antiphon ends and the remaining Sacred Hosts are placed in the tabernacle and any remaining Precious Blood is consumed. The sacred vessels are purified by the priest, deacon, or an instituted acolyte, either immediately or following the Mass.

The assembly then observes a period of sacred silence for adoration and personal prayer.

May God’s Gift Bear Fruit

The period after communion may also include the singing of a psalm or hymn of praise, especially if there has been no Communion hymn. At the proper time we stand with the priest for the Prayer after Communion, in which the priest prays that God will allow the reception of the Holy Eucharist to bear fruit in our lives.

The Church draws her life from Christ in the Eucharist; by Him she is fed and by Him she is enlightened. The Eucharist is both a mystery of faith and a ‘mystery of light.’ Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the faithful can in some way re-live the experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: ‘their eyes were opened and they recognized Him’ (Lk 24:31).”

- John Paul II, Ecclesia de Eucharistia, n. 6.