



Diocese of Springfield in Illinois

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Office of the Bishop

Liturgical Catechesis for the

INSTRUCTION ON THE CUSTOM OF BLESSINGS DURING HOLY COMMUNION,

Bishop Thomas John Paprocki
Diocese of Springfield in Illinois
December 1, 2020

The instruction calls for proper catechesis regarding this instruction to be given in all parishes, institutions, and places where Mass is celebrated within the diocese. This catechesis easily falls into two parts.

- ONE is the training and formation of liturgical ministers who distribute Holy Communion.
- TWO is the liturgical catechesis that provides the initial and then ongoing formation of all the faithful and the catechumens as well as those who are not Catholic who participate with us at Mass.

The following is offered to help this catechesis:

1. What guidance does the Church give on receiving Holy Communion?
2. What is the common sign of reverence given by all those in the Communion procession?
3. What is spiritual communion?
4. Is it necessary to be in the Communion procession to make an act of spiritual communion?
5. May a spiritual communion be made outside Mass?
6. What are additional examples of prayers for a spiritual communion?
7. What changes will need to be made in the Communion procession at Masses celebrated within the diocese?
8. Bulletin Shorts

1. What guidance does the Church give on receiving Holy Communion?

On November 14, 1996, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops approved the following guidelines on the reception of communion. These guidelines replace the guidelines approved by the Administrative Committee of the NCCB in November 1986. The guidelines, which are to be included in missalettes and other participation aids published in the United States, seek to remind all those who may attend Catholic liturgies of the present discipline of the Church with regard to the sharing of eucharistic communion.

For Catholics

As Catholics, we fully participate in the celebration of the Eucharist when we receive Holy Communion. We are encouraged to receive Communion devoutly and frequently. In order to be properly disposed to receive Communion, participants should not be conscious of grave sin and normally should have fasted for one hour. A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord without prior sacramental confession except for a grave reason where there is no opportunity for confession. In this case, the person is to be mindful of the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, including the intention of confessing as soon as possible (canon 916). A frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance is encouraged for all.

For our fellow Christians

We welcome our fellow Christians to this celebration of the Eucharist as our brothers and sisters. We pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit in this Eucharist will draw us closer to one another and begin to dispel the sad divisions which separate us. We pray that these will lessen and finally disappear, in keeping with Christ's prayer for us "that they may all be one" (John 17:21).

Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life, and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to Holy Communion. Eucharistic sharing in exceptional circumstances by other Christians requires permission according to the directives of the diocesan bishop and the provisions of canon law (canon 844 § 4). Members of the Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Polish National Catholic Church are urged to respect the discipline of their own Churches. According to Roman Catholic discipline, the Code of Canon Law does not object to the reception of communion by Christians of these Churches (canon 844 § 3).

For those not receiving Holy Communion

All who are not receiving Holy Communion are encouraged to express in their hearts a prayerful desire for unity with the Lord Jesus and with one another.

For non-Christians

We also welcome to this celebration those who do not share our faith in Jesus Christ. While we cannot admit them to Holy Communion, we ask them to offer their prayers for the peace and the unity of the human family.

2. What is the common sign of reverence given by all those in the Communion procession?

The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops [USCCB], in preparing for the reception of the *Roman Missal, Third Edition*, was required to establish a common sign of reverence that each person would make before both kinds of Holy Communion. The current edition of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* [GIRM] states:

160. The Priest then takes the paten or ciborium and approaches the communicants, who usually come up in procession.

It is not permitted for the faithful to take the consecrated Bread or the sacred chalice by themselves and, still less, to hand them on from one to another among themselves. The 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 (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Instruction, *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, March 25, 2004, no. 91).

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. The consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant. When Holy Communion is received under both kinds, the sign of reverence is also made before receiving the Precious Blood.

To be clear, this sign of reverence is a simple bow of the head, not a deep bow of the body or a genuflection. By all making the same gesture in the same way, a unity of mind, heart, and belief is manifested by the assembly. The steps, then, for reception of the Sacrament are:

- a) After receiving the consecrated host or drinking the Precious Blood, the preceding communicant steps away from the minister of Holy Communion.
- b) The next communicant bows his or head and steps before the minister.

- c) The minister raises the host or chalice slightly for the ritual dialogue: either “The Body of Christ” or “The Blood of Christ” to which the communicant responds “Amen” and receives the Sacrament.
- d) Should the communicant desire to receive Holy Communion under only one kind, a slight bow of the head is made to the other before passing by it.

[For those who choose to make a spiritual communion by entering the Communion procession but not receive Holy Communion, they cross their arms over the chest and make the same slight bow of the head described above before both consecrated host and Precious Blood.]

3. What is spiritual communion?

In their guidelines of 1996, the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops [USCCB] offered this practice for those not receiving Holy Communion: “All who are not receiving Holy Communion are encouraged to express in their hearts a prayerful desire for unity with the Lord Jesus and with one another.” This is a helpful method of spiritual communion.

The *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, on page 225, comments on this ancient practice and gives a definition:

Participation in the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice is a source and means of grace even apart from the actual reception of Holy Communion. It has also been long understood that when circumstances prevent one from receiving Holy Communion during Mass, it is possible to make a spiritual communion that is also a source of grace. Spiritual communion means uniting one’s self in prayer with Christ’s sacrifice and worshiping him present in his Body and Blood.

St. Thomas Aquinas, 1225-1274, defined a spiritual communion as “an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament and a loving embrace as though we had already received him.”

4. Is it necessary to be in the Communion procession to make an act of spiritual communion?

No. Spiritual communion is always a private action between an individual and the Lord. It does not need nor require ritual action or ritual dialogue. That is why spoken words are not needed.

5. May a spiritual communion be made outside Mass?

Yes. Any of the suggested prayers listed below may be used. Even the ritual dialogue before Communion may be used in this instance. It clearly recalls the encounter of Jesus with the Centurion about his sick servant (see Matthew 8:8 and Luke 7:6-7). It invites us to approach Communion and spiritual communion with that same humility.

Lord, I am not worthy
that you should enter under my roof,
but only say the word
and my soul shall be healed.

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6. What are additional examples of prayers for a spiritual communion?

All that is needed to make an act of spiritual communion is to ask the Lord Jesus Christ to be with you spiritually. You may use your own words or no words at all. Here are some prayers from the Church's treasury.

The *Roman Missal, Third Edition* provides a small collection of prayers for Thanksgiving After Mass. These three, by custom, are also recommended for making an act of spiritual Communion.

Anima Christi – Prayer to the Most Holy Redeemer

- This prayer dates from the early 14th century. Its authorship is uncertain.

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.
Body of Christ, save me.
Blood of Christ, embolden me.
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
O good Jesus, hear me.
Within your wounds hide me.

Never permit me to be parted from you.
From the evil Enemy defend me.
At the hour of my death call me
and bid me come to you,
that with your Saints I may praise you
for age upon age.
Amen.

Prayer of Self-Offering

- St. Ignatius of Loyola, 1491-1556

Receive, Lord, my entire freedom.
Accept the whole of my memory,
my intellect and my will.
Whatever I have or possess,
it was you who gave it to me;
I restore it to you in full,
and I surrender it completely
to the guidance of your will.
Give me only love of you
together with your grace,
and I am rich enough
and ask for nothing more.
Amen.

En ego, O bone et dulcissime Iesu – Prayer to Our Lord Jesus Christ Crucified

- This prayer is also called the Prayer before a Crucifix.

Behold, O good and loving Jesus,
that I cast myself on my knees before you
and, with the greatest fervor of spirit,
I pray and beseech you to instill into my heart
ardent sentiments of faith, hope and charity,
with true repentance for my sins
and a most firm purpose of amendment.
With deep affection and sorrow
I ponder intimately
and contemplate in my mind your five wounds,
having before my eyes what the prophet David
had already put in your mouth about yourself, O good Jesus:
They have pierced my hands and my feet;
they have numbered all my bones.
(Psalm 21: 17-18)

Other prayers:

An Act of Love

- St. Francis of Assisi, 1181-1226

I believe you are present in the Blessed Sacrament, O Jesus. I love you and desire you. Come into my heart; I embrace you. O never leave me. I beseech you, O Lord Jesus, may the burning and most sweet power of your love absorb my mind, that I may die through love of your love, who was graciously pleased to die through love of my love. Amen.

An Act of Spiritual Communion

- St. Alphonsus Liguori, 1696-1787

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I desire to receive you into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace you as if you were already there and unite myself wholly to you. Never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.

For very young children, parents and catechists may adapt these prayers for adults to craft language that is suitable. Some examples are:

- Lord Jesus, you are with me.
- Lord Jesus, be with me always.
- Lord Jesus, I long for the day of my first Holy Communion.

7. What changes will need to be made in the Communion procession at Masses celebrated within the diocese?

The Instruction itself provides the following.

First. Normally those who will not receive Holy Communion at a given Mass should not come up in the Communion procession.

- Just as the entrance procession, the Gospel procession, and the gifts procession do not include everyone in the assembly, nor does the Communion procession.
- This procession is for those who will eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ.
- However, infants may be carried by their parents and children who have not yet received First Eucharist may accompany their parents in the Communion procession.

Second. Should some who will not receive Holy Communion choose to join in the Communion procession, they present themselves with their arms crossed over their chests and make the same reverence as those who will receive Communion make, that is, they stop and make a slight bow of the head both to the Body of Christ and to the Blood of Christ while passing in procession.

- Catechumens are dismissed from Mass following the homily and so are not present for the Liturgy of the Eucharist and the Communion Rite. On the rare occasions when they are present, they should not be taught or encouraged to take part in the Communion procession. The same is true for baptized candidates seeking to either complete the Sacraments of Initiation or to be received into full communion.
- If the person pauses in expectation of some response, as a matter of courtesy, he or she should not be ignored or summarily dismissed, but should be assisted in making a spiritual communion.
- To do so, the Priest, Deacon or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion makes a slight head bow towards the person and says, "Receive Christ in your heart." Since this is not a blessing, but an invitation to worship, no other gesture accompanies these words and no verbal response is given.
 - "Care is taken not to create other words, statements, or other invitations.
- No blessing is to be given at this time whether by the Priest, Deacon, or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion. The entire congregation is blessed by the Priest at the end of Mass just prior to the dismissal.

Third. No ordinary minister (Bishop, Priest, or Deacon) or extraordinary minister (lay person) of Holy Communion shall extend a hand or touch the head or make a sign of the cross on or over someone in the Communion procession. Some reasons are:

- a) These signs may easily convey a blessing is given.
- b) It may confuse the faithful about who may and may not confer blessings within Mass.
- c) The touching of foreheads and then continuing to minister the Host raises a hygiene concern.
- d) Particles of the Host on the finger or thumb of the Communion minister may be transferred to the body of the person being touched on the head.

8. Bulletin Shorts

Any of the above may be used in whole or in part or adapted for use in local bulletins, handouts, websites, and formation materials. Here are some bulletin shorts for occasional use to assist ongoing formation.

For Those Not Receiving Holy Communion

The Bishops of the United States offer this guidance: “All who are not receiving Holy Communion are encouraged to express in their hearts a prayerful desire for unity with the Lord Jesus and with one another.”

What Is Spiritual Communion?

“Spiritual communion means uniting one’s self in prayer with Christ’s sacrifice and worshiping him present in his Body and Blood.”

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