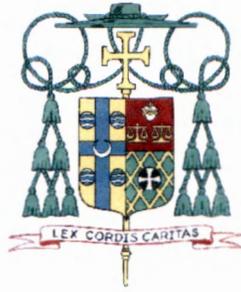


THOMAS IOANNES

Divina Miseratione et



Apostolicae Sedis Gratia

EPISCOPUS CAMPIFONTIS IN ILLINOIS

INSTRUCTION ON THE CUSTOM OF BLESSINGS DURING HOLY COMMUNION

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

The custom has arisen in many Catholic churches whereby people present themselves for blessings during the time of Holy Communion. Those who do so are often children who have not yet made their First Holy Communion and adults who are not eligible to receive Holy Communion because they have not observed the one-hour eucharistic fast (canon 919), are conscious of grave sin that they have not confessed (canon 916), or are prevented from the reception of the Eucharist for some other canonical reason, such as those who are not Catholic and catechumens who have not been dismissed.

My predecessor, Bishop George Lucas, addressed this practice when the *Roman Missal, Third Edition* was promulgated in Latin in 2000 and 2002 along with the accompanying *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. The diocesan *Norms for Ordinary and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion* were issued in November 2002 after presentation and consultation with the priests at convocation. The following is one part of the section on Some Questions and Answers Concerning the Norms:

Q. Should those who will not or may not receive communion be in the communion procession?

A. **No.** The procession, as is communion itself, is reserved to those permitted to receive communion in the Catholic Church. See "Guidelines for the Reception of Communion" approved by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on November 14, 1996 and the *Province of Chicago Ecumenical Guidelines: That All May Be One* issued by the bishops of the province in 1986. Parents should use their good judgment concerning infants and small children.

Blessing infants, children, and adults still takes place on a regular basis within the diocese as well as across the country. This practice developed in some places in the early 1980's and spread across the country. It surely grew out of a pastoral response to include those in the assembly who participated in many ways but were unable to share in eating and drinking the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion. Sometimes, however, a practice begins with good intentions and even continues for a while that on further thinking and theological reflection should be changed in a significant way or discontinued all together.

Among liturgical and theological reasons for omitting blessings during the Communion procession and any appearance of blessings to those in the procession who do not share in Communion are:

1. The principal blessing within Mass takes place in the Concluding Rites just before the dismissal dialogue.
2. Within Mass, it belongs to the presiding Bishop or Priest to confer blessings.
3. Lay people, within the context of Mass, are unable to confer blessings. See the *Book of Blessings* for clarity.
4. The Communion procession is for the giving and receiving of Holy Communion, doing what the Lord himself commands the faithful to do in his memory.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) approved "Guidelines for the Reception of Communion" on November 14, 1996. It does address who may and may not receive Communion during Catholic celebrations. While it does not specifically address the concern of those taking part in the Communion procession while not receiving, it is inferred that they should not be in the procession. Link to the statement is found at: <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/order-of-mass/liturgy-of-the-eucharist/guidelines-for-the-reception-of-communion.cfm>.

Some bishops have already addressed this situation, indicating that blessings are not permitted during the time of Holy Communion, but encouraging the traditional practice of spiritual communion. The *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, on page 225, comments on this ancient practice:

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 worshipping him present in his Body and Blood.

Spiritual communion is a private action between an individual and the Lord. It does not need nor require ritual dialogue or ritual action. That is why spoken words normally are not needed.

Therefore, in accord with my duty to exercise vigilance over ecclesiastical discipline, "especially regarding the ministry of the word, the celebration of the sacraments and sacramentals, the worship of God and the veneration of the saints" (canon 392, §2), I hereby issue the following instruction "to clarify the prescripts of laws and elaborate on and determine the methods to be observed in fulfilling them" (canon 34, §1), which may be published in parish bulletins or be read to the faithful at Mass:

Instruction

1. Normally those who will not receive Holy Communion at a given Mass should not join in the Communion procession. Just as the entrance procession, the Gospel procession, and the offertory procession do not include everyone in the congregation, 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.
2. 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, 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. 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.
3. 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. The faithful may present themselves and their children to the priest or deacon for an individual blessing as they leave the church following the recessional from Mass, if desired.

4. 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 that a blessing is being 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 administer the Host raises a hygiene concern.
 - d. Particles of the Host on the finger or thumb of the Eucharistic minister may be transferred to the body of the person being touched on the head.

Proper catechesis regarding this instruction is to be given in all parishes, institutions, and places where Mass is celebrated. A helpful document in this regard was issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops a few years ago entitled, "Happy Are Those Who Are Called To His Supper: On Preparing to Receive Christ Worthily in the Eucharist." The full document is available at:

<http://www.usccb.org/about/doctrine/publications/upload/statement-happy-are-those-who-are-called-to-his-supper-2006-11-14.pdf>

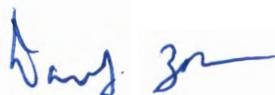
Our diocesan Office for Divine Worship and the Catechumenate has also prepared a helpful catechetical document entitled, "Liturgical Catechesis for the Instruction on the Custom of Blessings during Holy Communion."

May God bless everyone with a deep love for Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist.

Given at the Chancery this 1st day of December, 2020, effective January 1, 2021.



Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois



Reverend Daren J. Zehnle
Ecclesiastical Notary