



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We've come to the point in the Mass where we receive Communion. This is a moment of particular intimacy with Almighty God. As I've mentioned before, it is vitally important to prepare ourselves for this. It's interesting that while the Church requires for us to attend Mass every Sunday (or vigil on Saturday night) and Holy Days of Obligation, she does not require us to receive Communion at every Mass. We are only obligated to receive Communion once a year (during the Easter season). That being said, the Church does encourage frequent Communion, if we are properly disposed (see my last article for more information about that).

When we come for Communion, we process to the Eucharist – a liturgical action. As the priest processes with the servers at the beginning of Mass, we all process to the Eucharist. Think of the Bride coming to meet her Bridegroom at the wedding! We come forward to encounter our Divine Bridegroom, Christ our Lord. As the Groom's face changes when the Bride walks in, so does Christ's – as He rejoices to see us coming to Him!

When we are ready to receive, we make a suitable gesture of reverence – in the Dioceses of the United States, we are asked to bow before receiving Communion. If we receive in the hands, we make a throne with our hands – to hold the King of Kings – or we can receive on the tongue. The priest or minister says, "The Body of Christ," and we respond, "Amen." The "Amen" is important: we are saying, "I believe... yes, I believe this truly is the Body of Christ, that Almighty God is coming to me in this incredible form!" It is not a time to say, "Thank you," (as some do), but a statement of faith in receiving our God in the Eucharist.

If we receive in the hands, it is important to consume Jesus immediately. If you want a moment of reverence before placing Our Lord in your mouth, it is appropriate to take a step to the side before receiving, but not to walk back to your pew. Why not? Because we need to protect our Lord from profanation. Some have taken the Eucharist and, not knowing what to do with Him, have left Him in the pew or in the missalettes. Others, have taken our Lord for more nefarious purposes – to desecrate Him through a black mass, or other satanic rituals. The ministers need to be assured that you are not walking away with the Lord, and so we need to be sure that you receive Him before going back to your pew.

When you go back to your pew, this is a time for prayer. Primarily, it is a time of thanksgiving and praise to God, though we can also take the time to make intercession. Jesus, our Bridegroom has just entered into an intimate union with us, saying, "This is My Body given up for you," and it is akin to the marriage act between bride and groom (though not a sexual union). It is a time to be with Jesus, in awe of His wonder.

After Communion, the priest purifies the vessels. We make sure there are no particles of the Eucharist left, as a testament to our belief in the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Then there is the final of the three orations: The Prayer After Communion. This prayer reflects on the mystery into which we entered by receiving our Lord in Communion.

This then ends the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Next week, we'll look at the Concluding Rites. In the meantime, let's make a concerted effort to prepare ourselves for the incredible grace of receiving our Lord in Holy Communion.