



Take and Eat, Take and Drink

A Pastoral Letter on Holy Communion and the Reception of the Precious Blood

Father Scott McCue

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My Dear People,

Growing up in Jersey (where we say “Jersey” and not “New Jersey”), we had delicious delicacies like fabulous pizza and good bagels. Here in Cary, I have found a couple of places where pizza is worthy, and the bagels bring back memories of home. Maybe you, too, have moved from the northeast and have craved the foods you grew up with. Maybe you miss a good Philly cheesesteak. Or perhaps you used to live in San Diego and miss good fish tacos. Perhaps growing up in Louisiana, you miss eating some good, authentic gumbo. We all have our favorite foods, those things that we really crave when we are hungry, and we know that they will fill us.

The Eucharist is the food we have for the journey of life. It is what fills us. It is the essence of our Catholic life: the Bread of Life and Cup of Eternal Salvation. **Our belief in the Real Presence tells us that Jesus is fully present, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, under the species of both the Body of Christ and the Blood of Christ.** Before COVID-19, it was the norm in the Diocese of Raleigh for Communion to be received under both species. Following the pandemic, Bishop Luis Rafael left it to the discretion to each Pastor to decide how and when to best do this in his parish. I am happy to inform you that we will resume distribution of Communion under both species here at St. Michael the weekend of September 6-7.



Before we get into the particulars of the restoration of the cup, I want to use this letter as an opportunity to share some thoughts with you about the Eucharist and our reception of Holy Communion.

An Act of Unity

The United States Bishops remind us:

At Christ's invitation, extended by the priest acting in Christ's person: "Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb," the members of the community move forward to share in the sacred meal, to receive the Body and Blood of Christ which is the sign and the source of their unity. In fact, each time we move forward together to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord, we join the countless ranks of all the baptized who have gone before us, our loved ones, the canonized and uncanonized saints down through the ages, who at their time in history formed a part of this mighty stream of believers.

This is one of the reasons why we sing a Communion Hymn or Chant. The [*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*](#) (GIRM) mandates that the Communion Hymn should begin at the Communion of the priest and extend until the last person has received Communion. The hymn should never be seen as an intrusion into one's private prayer. Rather, it is the thanksgiving prayer of a community united in Christ.

I am afraid that too many Catholics see the reception of Communion as just something between themselves and God. Receiving Holy Communion is never a private act. It is a corporate act through which we unite our prayers to one another and the Church throughout the world. This is why it is important to, for example, join in the Communion Hymn.

It is also important that we never do anything outside of what the Church or the local Conference of Bishops prescribes for how we are to receive Communion (more on that below).

One last note. Often, I see people doing something different at Mass from everyone else. For example, sometimes when a latecomer arrives for Mass, he or she will kneel down and say private prayers as one would before Mass begins. This is inappropriate as one is ignoring the common act of worship that is taking place. It is important to always be in unison with everyone else at Mass.

How to Prepare for & Receive Communion

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 be conscious of no grave sin and normally should have fasted for one hour.

The Conference of Bishops of each country determines the posture to be used for the reception of Holy Communion and the act of reverence to be made by each person as he or she receives Communion. **The U.S. Bishops have determined that Holy Communion is to be received standing, unless an individual member of the faithful wishes to receive Communion kneeling (GIRM 160).** As a reminder, the communicant is to make an act of reverence in the form of a slight bow of the head before he or she receives Communion. **You should not genuflect.** Genuflection is reserved as a sign of reverence for Christ present in the tabernacle when you arrive for and when you leave Mass.



One may receive Communion either in the hand or on the tongue. Both are acceptable and one is not more reverent than the other. The decision is left to the individual communicant. If you will receive Communion in the hand, and you are right-handed, the left hand should rest upon the right. The host will then be laid in the palm of the left hand and then taken by the right hand to the mouth. If you are left-handed, this is reversed. **It is not appropriate to reach out with the fingers and take the host from the person distributing.** If you are receiving on the tongue, please be sure to extend your tongue so that the minister may place the host on your tongue. When receiving from the cup, bow slightly as the person before you leaves, take the cup from the minister and hand it back. If you have children who are old enough to receive Holy Communion, please review these instructions with them, and if necessary, please help them receive reverently.

It is not permissible for a person to self-communicate by dipping their host into the Communion cup, a practice known as intinction. If one is not able or willing to drink from the cup, he or she should receive Holy Communion only in the form of the host.

The proper response after the Priest, Deacon or Extraordinary Minister says, “The Body of Christ” or “The Blood of Christ” is “Amen.” This is our response, our “I believe,” to the statement by the minister that Christ is truly present in Holy Communion.

In the Diocese of Raleigh, you may sit, stand, or kneel after Communion when you return to your pew.

Two final notes:

The Church defines an “Ordinary” Minister of Holy Communion as a priest or deacon. An “Extraordinary” Minister is a lay person commissioned to assist the Ordinary Minister in the distribution of Holy Communion due to the number of communicants. It should be noted that it is perfectly acceptable to receive Communion from either an Ordinary or Extraordinary Minister. One should avoid crossing lines to receive from a priest or deacon. Ordinary and Extraordinary Ministers distribute the same Christ.

It is important that one does not create a Communion ritual for him or herself. Rather, it is important to be in communion with what the Church, the Conference of Bishops and what the local bishop determines as the norms for receiving Holy Communion. If personal Communion rituals are created, it makes the reception of Holy Communion more about us than about communion with Christ and with the Church.

Communion Under Both Species



The Roman Missal (#17) states: “From the first days of the Church’s celebration of the Eucharist, Holy Communion consisted of the reception of both species in fulfillment of the Lord’s command to ‘take and eat....take and drink.’ The distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful under both kinds was thus the norm for more than a millennium of Catholic liturgical practice.” This practice continued until the late 11th century, but it was decreed by the Council of Constance in 1415 that Holy Communion under the form of bread alone would be distributed to the faithful. (Roman Missal #18) With the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, Communion under both kinds has been the norm since 1978 when the Bishops of the United States approved this.

We teach and believe that Jesus is really and truly fully present in both the Eucharistic Bread and the Eucharistic Cup. The Church in her introduction to the rites of the Eucharist in the Roman Missal states clearly (quoting from the FIRST translation after Vatican II): “Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it takes place under both kinds. For in this form, the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident, and clearer expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the connection between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological (end-time, or heavenly) banquet in the Kingdom of the Father.” (Roman Missal #20, quoting GIRM #281) The original General Instruction (GIRM) further states that “at the same time, the faithful should be instructed to participate more readily in this sacred rite, by which the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is made more fully evident.” (GIRM #282, quoted in #20 of current translation)

Some reservations regarding Communion from the cup stem from a fear of disease and the possible spread of germs. Professional medical research on this topic has concluded that there is no known outbreak of disease directly related to this liturgical practice.¹ Individuals with colds or who do not feel well, of course, are encouraged to use common sense and refrain from the reception of the cup.

It is also important to note that sometimes, despite our best efforts to estimate the amount of wine needed for a particular Mass, we may run out of the Precious Blood before all who desire to receive from the cup have been able to do so. There is no need to worry over this given that Christ is fully present in both the Body and Blood.

Glorify the Lord by Your Life

At the end of Mass, the priest or deacon sends the assembly forth. One of the options that the priest or deacon can say at this time is “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.” The assembly is sent forth to be witnesses to Christ in the world in word and deed. Through the way we live our life, we give glory to God. Part of this glorification of God is through our service to others. **There is an intrinsic link between the Mass and our life in the world. The Eucharist must impel us to service.**

At the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday, the priest washes the feet of his parishioners in imitation of Christ who washed the feet of his Apostles. After I wash someone’s feet on Holy Thursday, I say to them, “As I have done, so also must you do.” This is the command that Christ gave to his Apostles. He, their teacher and Lord, washed their feet as an example. They were to go and do the same in their loving service to others. If we are not putting ourselves out there in service of others, especially those most in need, we are not really understanding what it means to be a Eucharistic people.

It is also important for me to note that you should stay for the entirety of the Mass. I am afraid that many have become accustomed to leaving Mass early after Communion. There is grace in being present for the whole Mass and receiving the final blessing.



I do hope that this Pastoral Letter has served to educate and remind you of the great importance that we as Catholics place on the Eucharist. It is at the very center of all that we do. As a priest, it is my great privilege to preside at the Eucharist. Bishop Luis is fond of saying that the priest presides and all of us celebrate the Mass. That is true. We are all celebrants of the liturgy in some way. We each have our role to play in this great act of Thanksgiving. I pray that the Eucharist continues to fulfill our hunger and quenches our thirst as we eat and drink the Body and Blood of the Lord.

Fr. Scott

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