

Guidelines For The Reception Of Holy 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 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.

The norm established for the dioceses of the U.S. is that Communion is to be received standing, unless an individual member wishes to receive Communion while kneeling (GIRM 160). When receiving Holy Communion, the person approaches the minister and bows his or her head before the sacrament as a gesture of reverence. While the sign of reverence used to be a genuflection, for the sake of unity, the U.S. bishops asked that the faithful bow their head instead.

When the Communion minister says, “The Body of Christ” or “The Blood of Christ,” we respond “Amen” as a sign of our belief in the true presence – the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. By our “Amen,” we are saying, “I believe.”

The consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant. If receiving it on the hand, it is customary to place your left hand on top of your right hand, thus creating a throne for the Eucharist. After the host is placed in your left hand, you take it with your right hand and place it in your mouth to consume the host. If you are receiving on your tongue, it is important to stick your tongue out far enough for the minister to place the host on your tongue.

When receiving the Blood of Christ, after bowing and receiving the chalice in your hands, communicants drink the Blood of Christ and carefully return the chalice to the minister.

If you are not prepared to receive Communion or if someone with you is not Catholic, they can still approach the priest or deacon and receive a blessing. It is customary to cross your arms across your chest as a sign of your desire for a blessing.

Upon receiving the Eucharist, it is appropriate to return to your pew and spend some quiet time in prayer. Some people might prefer to silently pray a spontaneous prayer of thanksgiving or recite a traditional one from memory, while others might prefer to sit in silent communion with Jesus, whom they have just received. Another option is to participate in the singing of the hymn, if one is being sung.

Even though Mass ends shortly after receiving Communion, it is important to stay for the end of Mass, which includes a closing prayer, announcements (if any), and a final blessing. Having heard and reflected on the Scriptures and received Jesus in the Eucharist, the congregation is blessed and sent to go out into the world and announce the Gospel through the way they live.