A Pastoral Letter:

THE EUCHARISTIC COMMUNION PROCESSION AND THE RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION

2018

Bishop Richard J. Garcia, D.D.

Bishop of Monterey
Dear Friends in Christ,

This Pastoral Letter on The Eucharistic Procession and the Reception of Holy Communion has come together at the direction of Bishop Garcia. With the encouragement of the Presbyteral (Priest) Council the writing of the Pastoral was begun in 2017. It has been Bishop Garcia’s hope that all of us in each parish community celebrate the beauty of the Eucharist with one mind and heart, mindful that we belong to the local church in our Diocese of Monterey in California.

Bishop Garcia approved the final draft of the Pastoral Letter in February 2018. It has taken some time to translate, publish and provide this letter to you.

At its core this Pastoral Letter reminds us that the Ordinary Form (Post Vatican II Mass of Pope Paul VI) has its own beauty. In a different manner, so does the Extraordinary Form (from Pre-Vatican II 1962 Missal). Each of these two forms of worship are provided by our church as options for the people of our diocese in which they can elect to partake. Yet we should not attempt to confuse aspects of the two different forms of worship by adapting or promoting practices from one to the other.

May this Pastoral Letter help us to participate in the Eucharistic Procession and to receive the Body and Blood of Christ in a spirit of true devotion, as we acknowledge our call to live daily what we celebrate at Mass each time we gather together as Christ’s Mystical Body, the Church! May our practice of this letter’s contents be a tribute to Bishop Garcia and his devoted care for us as Shepherd of this Diocese.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Peter A. Crivello, V.G.
Diocese of Monterey
Introduction

The Eucharist is a multifaceted, precious jewel in the Sacramental Life of our Church. We cherish and reverence this celebration of our salvation — a perpetual memorial of Christ’s Death and Resurrection. As Bishop Sylvester Ryan reminded us in his Pastoral Letter, first issued in 1995, the Eucharist is the Church’s Sacred Banquet for which the faithful gather where Christ is truly present in the Assembly, in the Word, in the person of the Presider and of course in the Sacrament offered for all! The Eucharist calls us to offer worship as we ought to live, in peace, reconciled to God and each other, and in unity (Jn 15:12).

With this Pastoral Letter, I would like to draw our attention to and articulate the teaching of our Church regarding the beauty of the Communion Procession and the reception of Holy Communion. I address you, my brother priests, deacons, religious men and women and all the faithful of our local Church in the Diocese of Monterey. Please take these reminders to heart, implementing and practicing them in the celebration of the Eucharist.

On August 24, 2017, Pope Francis addressed those gathered for the 68th Italian National Liturgical Week in Rome. On this occasion he reminded them and us of important dispositions toward understanding and celebrating the Eucharist. Here, he emphasized that the reforms of the Second Vatican Council are not to be rethought but, rather, we are to better understand their underlying reasons and inspirational principles while observing the discipline that governs them. He affirmed with magisterial authority that the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council are irreversible. Pope Francis reminds us that “the Eucharist is not a sacrament ‘for me’; it is the sacrament of the many, who form one body, God’s holy and faithful people.” Here he emphasized the communal nature of the Eucharist. He also reminded us of our call to always deepen our understanding of the Eucharist.

Our celebration of the Eucharist helps us to articulate the heart of who we are and what we believe as Catholic Christians. The Second Vatican Council defines the Church as the Pilgrim People of God (Lumen Gentium, paragraph 48, Guadium et spes, paragraph 57). Through the journey of life, we strive to grow in understanding, love and service of our God whom we encounter especially through the Church and its Sacraments. We acknowledge Christ’s new commandment and prayer to “love one another, as I have loved you.” (Jn 13:34). Called to be God’s Pilgrim People in faith, in the Eucharist we acknowledge and celebrate our God who is present to us and accompanies us in life and in our call to live in Christian charity with each other.
Significance of Symbols and Posture During the Eucharist

Symbols and postures during the Eucharist help us to express the reality of our faith and our lives. Bread and wine made from many grains of wheat and many grapes, crushed and broken, become for us one bread, one cup, and in turn, Christ’s body and blood. Together we stand to listen attentively to the Gospel, acknowledging Christ’s true presence, as together we kneel in prayerful adoration during the Eucharistic Prayer to do the same. The use of sacramental signs and symbols is important. The same is true in practicing unity of posture which helps us to take into our hearts that we are a community united in mind, heart and prayer together offering God our praise and thanksgiving.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal reminds us in paragraph 42, “the gestures and bodily posture of both the Priest, the Deacon, and the ministers, and also of the people, must be conducive to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity, to making clear the true and full meaning of the different parts, and to fostering the participation of all. Attention must therefore be paid to what is determined by this General Instruction and by the traditional practice of the Roman Rite and to what serves the common spiritual good of the People of God, rather than private inclination or arbitrary choice. A common bodily posture, to be observed by all those taking part, is a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community gathered together for the Sacred Liturgy, for it expresses the intentions and spiritual attitudes of the participants and also fosters them.”

The Eucharistic Prayer

In the United States the adapted norm is for all to kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer. This adapted norm is common, widely used and has been customary for generations in our diocese and throughout the United States. While we kneel in adoration, our participation is essential, uniting our minds and hearts to the Eucharistic Prayer offered by the presiding bishop or priest while at the altar.

However, the norm used by the Universal Church is for all to stand during the Eucharistic Prayer. Standing is a posture which symbolizes that we are witnesses of the Crucified and Risen Lord present to us in the midst of our Eucharistic Celebration. With special permission from the Bishop, some parishes have chosen the posture of standing during the Eucharistic Prayer.

When this is the case, proper catechesis should accompany this practice for the understanding of this posture, not as one less reverent, but rather one rooted in the ancient practice and spirituality of our Church’s legacy of the Christian faithful gathering to participate in the Pascal Feast of the Lamb.

Lamb of God

While the universal norm is to kneel after the Lamb of God, as the faithful of our diocese have been instructed since the time of my predecessor, we remain standing during this time. As stated in
General Instruction on the Roman Missal, paragraph 43, the local Diocesan Bishop may instruct on this point of the Mass and determines otherwise.

A reminder to my brother priests that this moment of the Eucharist is not the appropriate time to instruct the faithful on their worthiness to receive the Eucharist. There are many other opportunities for instruction on the spiritual benefits of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. During the Mass itself we employ the Penitential Rite and at this point of the Sacred Liturgy we all acknowledge our unworthiness. Indeed, it is by the grace of God that we are all “healed” and made worthy to partake of the Sacred Banquet of the Eucharist. We must trust that the faithful will have already examined their own conscience as to their disposition to partake in Holy Communion.

The Communion Procession

During the Communion Procession we most certainly also acknowledge our discipleship in Christ and our call to unity. Through Him we come forward together as God’s Pilgrim People to receive our Holy nourishment for our journey of life, our journey of faith: Christ’s Body and Blood in the Eucharist! Our many voices unite to form one song of praise for God who comes to meet us through the presence of His Son and our Savior, Christ Jesus.

Receiving the Eucharist is to be approached with awe and reverence. Yet it is not “a personal moment” of prayer or adoration. We must not lose sight that when we come forward for the Communion Procession we do this together united to our brothers and sisters in faith, who are a gift from God. We support each other in our yearning to encounter the love of God. For these reasons and more, we approach to receive Holy Communion together, united in Christ's love poured out for us in the mystery of his Passion, Death and Resurrection. With this as our basis of faith and worship we are not to make this time when our personal prayer or personal preference of posture take precedence over what is the Sacred Action of the Assembly, God’s gathered people. Yet exceptions for the elderly, infirm or disabled can be made when necessary.

For this reason, the General instruction of the Roman Missal teaches us that together we come forward to receive Holy Communion and do so standing, as specified by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops. We process and stand together, not out of mere practicality, but as living witnesses to Christ our Lord who has conquered sin and death. As in other aspects of the Eucharist, our common posture is significant. Our posture helps us to articulate our call to unity in Christ. While those who choose to receive Holy Communion kneeling should not be denied, I urge pastors, as does the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, to provide proper catechesis for the faithful to address the reasons that standing is the norm to receive Holy Communion.
Reception of Holy Communion
As each communicant approaches the priest, deacon or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, he or she is encouraged to bow his or her head as a gesture of reverence for the Sacrament before receiving the Body of the Lord, and again when receiving the Precious Blood.

When receiving the Eucharist, the faithful have the option to do so either in the hand or on the tongue, at the discretion of each communicant. One way is not considered better or more holy or preferred by the Church, as long as either is done with reverence.

The Precious Blood should be offered as often as possible. Pastors should strive for ongoing liturgical formation so that extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are available in order to distribute the Precious Blood at various communion stations. This should be the norm as often as possible.

It is preferred that each communicant receive from the Communion Cup. Intinction is only to be done by a priest in special circumstances and it should not be the customary practice in this diocese. Intinction diminishes the important symbolic nature of us sharing from one cup and the communicant is not permitted to intinct. Instruction regarding this should not be done during the Communion Procession but at another suitable time.

Partaking of the Precious Blood from the communion cup is always optional. Concerns can arise especially during winter months and flu season. The faithful should be instructed to refrain from partaking of the cup when not feeling well, and may be reminded they are never obliged to attend Mass when ill.

As is the teaching of the Church and has been taught in our diocese for many years, everyone is to remain standing while singing with grateful hearts until all have received Holy Communion. Again, this is another sign of the unity we share in Christ.

In some parishes, it may be customary to wait until the Blessed Sacrament has been returned to the tabernacle for the faithful to be seated. This is not necessary or obligatory. Rather, after all have received, the faithful should be encouraged to offer a prayer of thanksgiving. At this point a time of Sacred Silence should be allowed for and encouraged. At this moment in the Liturgy of the Eucharist either kneeling or sitting is most appropriate.

In closing, I ask you, fervently, to value the entire celebration of the Eucharist, offered daily and especially on Sunday, in our parishes in our diocese and throughout the world. I ask you, as your Bishop, to please be attentive to following these teachings and reminders I have shared with you in this Pastoral Letter. To pastors and those who lead liturgical catechesis and formation, please help the faithful understand the value of the manner which the Church asks us to come forward for
the Communion Procession and the Reception of Holy Communion. To all the faithful, please take these postures and practices to heart, prayerfully, with open minds.

Also, do your best to not only be on time but to arrive early, to prepare spiritually for Mass and to be hospitable to others. Listen attentively to the Scripture readings, participate in spoken and sung responses actively and reverently, and approach the Holy Communion together with gratitude and reverence. Together we are the Church, responding to the prayer of Christ Jesus our Lord to live and celebrate in unity, His Mystical Body, a Pilgrim People who journey with each other in love of God and in concern for and service of one another.

+ Most Reverend Bishop Richard J. Garcia, Diocese of Monterey

### Themes Summarized

1. The Eucharist is a call to unity and is communal in nature. Pope Francis has recently emphasized that the reforms of the Second Vatican Council are irreversible which calls us to amply understand their underlying principles.

2. Unity of posture is an important expression of the communal nature of the Eucharist. This certainly applies to the Communion Procession as well as to the other parts of the Mass.

3. The norm for receiving communion is to do so standing not kneeling.

4. The faithful may choose to receive the consecrated host either on the tongue or in the hand.

5. After the Communion Procession concludes, time for silence and kneeling is appropriate.
Addendum

Devotions
Any devotions that are promoted publicly in parish life can benefit the spiritual well-being of God’s people. However, these are not to be added on to the celebration of the Eucharist. For example, devotional prayers or recitation of the rosary should not occur at any time before the final blessing. These devotions should happen separately, ideally at a different time. If done in conjunction with the celebration of Mass, wait until after the conclusion of the Final/Recession Song is done.

Eucharistic Adoration
I encourage pastors and parish liturgical leaders to encourage Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass, also known as Eucharistic Adoration. This can be done with personal visits to the Blessed Sacrament or special time of communal prayer services. Many spiritual benefits are attributed to fostering this type of profound devotion, meditating on the mystery of Christ’s love of us through His abiding presence in the Eucharist.

If the Eucharist is to be exposed for Adoration after Mass, the directives given in Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass are to be followed, paragraphs 93-98. The time of Adoration should be of significant length. Benediction is not to immediately follow Mass.

Contributors

Most Reverend Sylvester D. Ryan

Very Reverend Peter A. Crivello, V.G.

Reverend Matthew Pennington, M.A., Liturgical Studies, Notre Dame University

Sister Barbara Long, OP, M.A., Director of Divine Worship, Diocese of Monterey

Sister Sharon McMillan, SND, STD, Sacred Liturgy, Pontifical Liturgical Institute, Sant’Anselmo, Rome

Paul F Ford, PhD, Professor of Systematic Theology and Liturgy, St. John’s Seminary, Camarillo, CA.