



FR. DANIEL'S CORNER

Mass Moment: Part 29

BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD: COMMUNION

Before the reception of the Holy Communion, the priest prepares himself by a prayer, said quietly, so that he may fruitfully receive the Body and Blood of Christ. The faithful do the same, praying silently (GIRM, 84). The priest reverently genuflects, then rising, holds the fragments of the broken host together over a Paten (or over a Chalice) and shows the sacred host to the people saying: “*Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world...*” His action and his words want to insist that this broken bread you see before you and the blood poured out in your presence is nothing less than Christ himself. Again, this reflects on John the Baptist’s recognition of Jesus as the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29) or the suffering servant of Yahweh in the prophecy of Isaiah (Is 53).

How rightly and indeed blessed are those invited to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb (Rev 19:9)! With the priest, the gathered assembly uses the words of the Centurion at Capernaum (Mt 8:8), an act of humility, saying: “*Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.*” The priest then self-communicates under both species (Body and Blood) and prays for himself and the people inaudibly. Then comes the distribution and reception of the Holy Eucharist by those gathered who have prepared themselves in a worthy manner. The ritual for the reception of communion is simple: Body of Christ, Blood of Christ, we say “Amen” [there is no need to thank the priest or say something else] not only to express our belief but also to ratify the exchange, to say that we agree to it, that we accept its consequences. We accept becoming ourselves the body and blood of Christ in the world.

While the Extra-ordinary ministers of the Holy Eucharist may assist for practical reasons, the priest, the principal minister, always stands at the centre and distributes as a sacramental sign of Christ himself—giving of himself to the communicants. The reception of communion is not merely the coincidental juxtaposition of so many individual believers, rather each is sacramentally united with the Lord in his body and blood. The notion of oneness is essential to understanding correctly what we do. It is all of these individuals being constituted as one body, and as one body— only as one body— united with the body’s head, Christ, and animated by the one Spirit who has raised this body, the Church, from the dead. In this oneness that is accomplished by the reception of communion by all, and in the sign which is thus made, we can then see in the Church the sign, the image, of the Holy Trinity; that is, many who are one.

At the reception of the Holy Communion, the communicant either can receive on the palms or on the tongue depending on the local practices and permission granted by the local episcopal conference. Whichever way one receives the Body of Christ, care must be taken that no sacrilege is involved. For those especially who receive on the palms, they are to make sure that no particles remain on the palms. No one is allowed to break the communion other than the breaking done by the priest at the *fractum*. The Holy Communion is to be received and consumed on the spot. After which the communicant goes back to the pews and kneeling, which is recommended except for physical inability, enters into a communion of prayers of thanksgiving.

And that is your Mass Moment for the week.