

Ask a Priest!
June 28, 2021

Question: Is there a big difference in receiving the Eucharist by mouth or by hand?

Answer: "The General Instruction asks each country's Conference of Bishops to determine the posture to be used for the reception of Communion and the act of reverence to be made by each person as he or she receives Communion. In the United States, the body of Bishops determined that Communion should be received standing, and that a bow is the act of reverence made by those receiving. These norms may require some adjustment on the part of those who have been used to other practices; however the significance of unity in posture and gesture as a symbol of our unity as members of the one body of Christ should be the governing factor in our own actions.

Those who receive Communion may receive either in the hand or on the tongue, and the decision should be that of the individual receiving, not of the person distributing Communion."

Instructions on Receiving Holy Communion with Proper Reverence

Hand

St. Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century offered a beautiful and powerful catechesis on the mode of receiving communion in the hand that is still applicable today: "When you approach, do not go stretching out your open hands or having your fingers spread out, but make the left hand into a throne for the right which shall receive the King, and then cup your open hand and the Body of Christ, reciting the 'Amen.' Then sanctify with all care your eyes by touching the Sacred Body, and receive it. But be careful that no particles fall, for what you lose would be to you as if you had lost some of your members. Tell me, if anybody had given you gold dust, would you not hold fast to it with all care, and watch lest some of it fall and be lost to you? Must you not then be even more careful with that which is more precious than gold and diamonds, so that no particles are lost?"

Tongue

If you choose to receive on the tongue, great! This has been the centuries-old custom of our ancestors. The contemporary church offers little instruction in this area so here is some advice. You should practice in a mirror. It's really very simple – while your mouth is closed, make sure your tongue is touching the inside of your

lower lip. Then, maintaining this tongue position, open your mouth as wide as you can by lowering your lower jaw. Your mouth and tongue are then in the correct position for the Priest to place the Host on your tongue.

Not all bishops' conferences have requested permission to allow people to receive communion in the hand, and the traveling Catholic should be ready to adapt to local customs with respect to posture and mode of receiving Communion.

The Church's official Regulations

From the General Instruction of the Roman Missal

#160. The priest then takes the paten or ciborium and goes to the communicants, who, as a rule, approach in a procession.

The faithful are not permitted to take the consecrated bread or the sacred chalice by themselves and, still less, to hand them from one to another. The norm for reception of Holy Communion in the dioceses of the United States is standing. Communicants should not be denied Holy Communion because they kneel.

When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the Sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister. The consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant. When Holy Communion is received under both kinds, the sign of reverence is also made before receiving the Precious Blood.

#161. If Communion is given only under the species of bread, the priest raises the host slightly and shows it to each, saying, Corpus Christi (The Body of Christ). The communicant replies, Amen, and receives the Sacrament either on the tongue or, where this is allowed and if the communicant so chooses, in the hand. As soon as the communicant receives the host, he or she consumes it entirely.

Article references:

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