

X. Proceeding with Communion – I

Changes in the Rite of Communion 2003

GIRM 1975 established practices that lasted nearly thirty years. What did GIRM 2002 change? What did it retain? Do you recall your reactions to revisions to this rite fifteen years ago? In fact, the largest number of changes to the Mass occurred in the Rite of Communion (2002).

Yet, before taking stock of which parts of the rite were changed, it would be good to reflect on the canonical weight of GIRM.

The Canonical Weight of the *General Instruction*

The 2002 *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (inaugurated in Advent (2003), like the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, provides universal law for the liturgy of the Church. It represents one of the highest forms of law giving in the Roman Catholic Church.

Since I served in the Archdiocese of Omaha when GIRM took effect, how it implemented GIRM.

“The GIRM is important to us because it represents the theological and spiritual reasons for celebrating the Mass properly. And, even though there are no substantive changes in the way we will celebrate Mass in the future, we and our people are going to have to make some adaptations to meet the requirements of the Instruction...”

“The revisions in the GIRM are the result of an ongoing process of renewal which is faithful to the directives of Vatican Council II. They have been made more necessary now because of the developments which have taken place since the last major revision in 1975. In 1983, a new Code of Canon Law established some legislative directives, many having to do with sacramental celebrations... Various decisions and other directives issued by the Vatican Congregations also have been incorporated into the GIRM...”

“The GIRM presents some ritual changes and refinements in the gestures, postures and words used at Mass. It also offers a reflection on the meaning and proper use of “sacred things” at Mass: the sanctuary furnishings, vestments, sacred vessels, and art used in the liturgy...”

(Letter of Archbishop Elden Francis Curtiss to priests and deacons of the archdiocese of Omaha, NE September 2, 2003)

Individual conferences of bishops around the world are able to adapt the universal law to *particular* or *local* circumstances.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops proposed an adaptation to GIRM by seeking an *indult*, an exception that allowed Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist to purify the vessels following the distribution of Communion (2005).

Following protocol, they approved their proposal with a 2/3-majority vote and sent the proposal to Rome to be recognized by the Holy See. In this way, particular law would focus the universal law in a given a region.

Our consideration of both history *and* contemporary practice of the Communion Rite in the U.S. can foster reflections today on how and why this parish has implemented GIRM the way it has.

Note how most of the items on the list below existed as provisions already in the 1975 GIRM and were *not* new directives. Four asterisks (****) mark those few items that *are* new directives.

[See the “Appendix” in, *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal 1969-2002: A Commentary* by Dennis Smolarski, SJ, for further details.]

A List of Procedures for the Rite of Communion in the Archdiocese of Omaha

➤ *Ministers of Communion – Ordinary and Extraordinary*

The following directives come directly from the letter of Archbishop Curtiss already cited.

The ordinary ministers of Holy Communion are priests and deacons. Extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist may be used only when there is not a sufficient number of ordinary ministers to distribute Communion *within a reasonable time*. Concelebrating priests and deacons may not defer this responsibility to extraordinary ministers.

Only the celebrant and concelebrating priests and deacons may participate in the fraction rite prior to Communion. Extraordinary Ministers can no longer be involved in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread or in pouring the Eucharistic wine into separate containers prior to Communion.

Extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist are not to approach the altar until the celebrant has received Communion. If a deacon is present... The deacon and extraordinary ministers may not receive Eucharist until the celebrant has received. EME’s receive the vessels containing the Eucharist for distribution from the celebrant.

Only the celebrant or concelebrating priest(s) or deacon may remove the Ciborium from the tabernacle prior to Holy Communion. After Communion one of the ordained ministers must return the Eucharist to the tabernacle.

In this archdiocese, if there is no concelebrating priest or deacon, and the tabernacle is a distance from the altar, then out of practical necessity, an EME may remove and return it to the tabernacle after Communion. This is the only situation in which an EME may remove or return the ciborium to the tabernacle.

Because of an *indult* granted previously to the U.S. bishops, for pastoral reasons EME's may help with the purification of the sacred vessels following distribution of Holy Communion.

"When you approach, do not extend your hands with palms upward and fingers apart; but make your left hand a throne for your right hand, since the latter is to receive the King. Then, while answering 'Amen,' receive the body of Christ in the hollow of your hand... Then, after receiving the body of Christ, approach his blood..."
(St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catecheses* V, 27)

➤ **Receiving Communion – the Body and Blood of Christ**

Communion under both kinds is a more complete sign of the Eucharistic presence of the Lord... [however] our people are not required to receive the Eucharist under both species if it is not their wish.

Regarding the practice of intinction, people are not permitted to take the host and then insert it in the cup themselves. Only the celebrant may distribute Communion by way of intinction to those who wish to receive Communion in this manner.

➤ **Receiving Communion – Gesture of Reverence**

GIRM... indicates that those receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord should make a sign of reverence to be determined by the bishops of each country. The U.S. bishops determined that the sign to be given before Communion is a bow, a simple gesture through which we express our reverence for the Eucharistic Lord and give honor to Him. (****)

Since it is already implemented in the archdiocese, we will simply continue with it.

However, I ask that all our people be instructed from time-to-time to bow their heads before they receive the [Body and Blood of Christ].

I remind our pastors that the Holy See has directed that those distributing Communion may not refuse Communion to persons who kneel to receive... our catechesis [is that] the ordinary way to receive Holy Communion now is standing so there is no interruption in the line of people coming to receive.

Also, communicants have the option to receive the sacred Host in the hand or on the tongue.

It is one of the adaptations for the Church in the U.S. that permission is given for communicants to stand or kneel during the period of religious silence after they have received Communion. Because of the tradition in this archdiocese of kneeling following Communion, we will continue this practice...

"That both the giver and the maker of the *Spiritual Exercises* may be of greater help and benefit to each other, it should be presupposed that every good Christian ought to be more eager to put a good interpretation on a neighbor's statement than to condemn it.
"Further, if one cannot interpret it favorably, one should ask how the other means it. If that meaning is wrong, one should correct the person with love; and if this is not enough, one should search out every appropriate means through which, by understanding the statement in a good way, it may be saved."
(St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, #22)

For discussion/reflection:

- What did you learn new from this article?
 - What did you find helpful here?
 - What did you find challenging?
- St. Ignatius asks any person making the *Spiritual Exercises* always to "put a good interpretation" on any statement by a neighbor.
 - What good was the Church trying to achieve in these directives?
 - What good has been accomplished?
- What aspects of receiving Communion help you? How do they help?
- What aspects of distributing Communion as a minister help you? How do they help?

This is the tenth in a series of eleven articles on the celebration of the Mass. Article #11 is entitled, *Proceeding with Communion, II*