

XI. Proceeding with Communion II

In this article, we will look at some few, final aspects of the Communion Rite and the Concluding Rite. We might just call these reflections...

I. GIRM–Asides

A. Questions About Communion or the Communion Rite

1. On Holding Hands at the Lord's Prayer

The *General Instruction* does not address in any way, shape, or form what has appeared as a “custom” in some U.S. parishes – holding hands at the Our Father. GIRM does not rule it out; it does not encourage it. Thus, those who either encourage it or condemn it do so from mere opinion.

The gesture of holding hands at the Lord's Prayer began at some point in time after the Vatican II reforms. For many the gesture manifests the unity of the community and strengthens the connections between members of the community. For others, it is anathema. In any case, holding hands has become almost synonymous with parishes with a strong appreciation for the horizontal element of liturgical praying. Perhaps it's more than that.

I suggest we consider holding hands at the Lord's Prayer an interim gesture, an action that holds a space open for horizontal connectivity in the midst of 'vertical' practices of praying.

So, here's a thought: Two key parts of the Liturgy of the Eucharist are *supposed* to manifest the Church's oneness – the Eucharistic Prayer and the Communion Procession. Yet, they don't show our union *experientially*. Few parishes seem to experience the Eucharistic Prayer as a manifestation of the Church as one-at-prayer. Most perceive this as the priest's prayer.

At the same time, many communicants receive Communion focused personal devotion than on the self in communion with the Church.

When our praying communities find new and compelling ways to enter into the Eucharistic Prayer and the reception of Communion as profoundly communal events – actions that actually *do* express and deepen *our* unity – then holding hands at the Lord's Prayer will become moot. Though fears elicited by the avian flu have already done this.

2. Fasting

The Church expects the faithful fast from food and drink (water and medication are permitted) at least one hour prior to receiving the Eucharist.

Many of us “Cradle Catholics” who are, say, 45 years old and older, recall the requirement of fasting 3 hours before receiving Communion. Some of us “geezers” will even remember, hopefully, the fast from midnight! The word, “break-fast,” points to that meal people enjoyed returning home after Mass.

a. Why should we fast today?

For some, fasting helps *anticipate* the gift of the Bread of Life they will be receiving in Eucharist. For others, fasting seems to be a sort of “cleansing the system.” Since they will soon take into their bodies this holiest of gifts from God, fasting not only increases their awareness of what they are receiving, but also separates the sacred from the profane, making special room for Christ.

Others regard fasting as a duty, possibly an inconvenience that can be disregarded (especially due to personal demand for coffee!)

What if... What if fasting allows us to discover our hunger? Certainly, physical hunger. What if fasting uncovers also our deep spiritual hungers?

When you come right down to it, don't we all pretty much just think about dealing with our hunger when fasting anyway? Therefore, this discipline can allow me to deal with the question, “What do I *truly* hunger for?” Or, “What *truly* satisfies my hunger?”

Many folks get (more) irritable when fasting. “How do I like being hungry?” Or, “what happens when I don't get what I want *now*?” Fasting could lead us to wonder whether we make one good thing serve a different purpose. For example, one may use alcohol (a good) to forget pain and deep emotional discomfort, which it never does.

Following this line of thought may lead us to comprehend our solidarity with the hungry people of the world, who also could well be irritable about being hungry.

Finally, fasting could put some of us in touch with our emptiness or loneliness, asking again, “What do I really long for?” Questions such as these could be nudge us to a greater awareness

- of the One we receive
- for whom we truly hunger (?)
- with open hands to receive the Bread of Life
- in the midst of a world that hungers.

3. Question: “Can one receive Communion more than once in a day?”

This question does arise from time to time in the parish setting. Good people who, for example, attend a funeral Saturday morning wonder about receiving Communion at a wedding the same day.

The *General Instruction* speaks to this situation by enunciating a simple principle: If participates in two different liturgies on the same day, it is appropriate to receive Eucharist at each.

What is important here is “participation in the liturgy.” When the Church gathers at Mass, each of us is called to participate in the it fully. And receiving Communion is an integral part of it. Should the occasion arise to participate in a second liturgy, “full, active, and conscious participation” invites / points to / requires that we communicate at that second liturgy.

This, of course, does rule out the practice of “church-hopping” *just* to receive Communion. The Eucharist is not a “thing” to get, but the culmination of the worship of the Church gathered.

4. Preparation for Sunday Liturgy

We all lead busy lives. The pace of life seems to increase day by day. And distractions abound. We make lists; plan our calendar; check email during the liturgy. Still, many actually want to arrive better prepared for Mass so that our encounter with the Word and Sacrament may have a greater effect in our lives.

May I recommend two web sites that provide helps for people to prepare for Sunday liturgy.

First, this popular site established here at Creighton University that features reflections on the Sunday Scripture Readings by Dennis Hamm, SJ: <http://www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/daily.html>

Second, the site from Center for Liturgy at St. Louis University offers insights into the Sunday liturgy from nine scholars: <http://liturgy.slu.edu/>

Third, this site run by Jesuits in Ireland invites people to pray daily in the quiet of their hearts: <http://www.jesuit.ie/prayer/>

B. The Communion Rite Concludes: Silence and / or Meditation Song

Once again, consider how the *General Instruction* has made silence a constitutive part of the prayer of the worshipping community:

“When the distribution of Communion is finished, as circumstances suggest, the priest and faithful spend some time praying privately. If desired, a psalm or other canticle of praise or a hymn may also be sung by the entire congregation.” (GIRM 88)

It appears that the music recommended for this moment is similar to the ‘communitarian’ nature of the Communion Rite since GIRM calls for a piece to be sung by the entire congregation. It is curious that the GIRM does not recognize solo or choral singing as belonging to this moment.

Prayer after Communion

This prayer has a very ancient form and purpose. It simply asks God to make our Communion fruitful. That, as we go forth into the world, what we have received may have an effect in our lives.

To bring to completion the prayer of the people of God, and, also to conclude the entire Communion rite, the priest sings or says the prayer after Communion in which he petitions for the fruits of the mystery just celebrated. [GIRM 89]

II. Concluding Rites

These are quite simple. Their purpose is to send the community forth, blessed by God, to “love and serve the Lord in one another.”

The concluding rites consist of:
brief announcements, if they are necessary;
the priest’s greeting and blessing, which on certain days and occasions is enriched and expressed in the prayer over the people or another more solemn formula;
the dismissal of the people by the deacon or the priest, so that each member goes out to do good works, while praising and blessing God;
the kissing of the altar by the priest and the deacon, followed by a profound bow to the altar by the priest, the deacon, and the other ministers.
[GIRM 90]

For discussion/reflection:

- What did I learn from this article?
- How might this community engage in the Eucharistic Prayer more mindfully?
- What does fasting mean to me?
- How might I prepare for Sunday liturgy?
- Do I feel that I am sent to live the mission of the Church by the Concluding Rites?

This is the eleventh and final article in a series of eleven articles on the Mass. Thank you.

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