



The Revised *General Instruction of the Roman Missal:* Order of Mass

Part 3: Liturgy of the Eucharist Rite of Communion Concluding Rite

During the Rite of Communion, the third movement of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the consecrated Bread and Wine are broken and distributed to the faithful. Then, having heard God's word proclaimed and having given thanks for the gift of salvation in Christ's Paschal Mystery and feasted on his Body and Blood, the assembly is sent forth to live as disciples of the risen Lord in the world.

Rite of Communion

The Lord's Prayer. The Rite of Communion begins with the Lord's Prayer. This ancient prayer, given by the Lord himself to his disciples, is prayed by the entire assembly. While it may be chanted (along with its embolism and doxology), the Lord's Prayer is suitably prayed in unison.

The *General Instruction* indicates that the priest celebrant and all concelebrants pray the Lord's Prayer with their hands in the *orans* position, that is, the arms, bent at the elbow, are extended upward or out with the palms facing forward or up. The Diocese of Stockton highly recommends this gesture for the faithful as well. This posture of prayer dates to the earliest days of the Church and is less intrusive to members of the assembly who do not wish to hold hands.

The Rite of Peace. "The Rite of Peace follows, by which the Church asks for peace and unity for herself and for the whole human family, and the faithful express to each other their ecclesial communion and mutual charity before communicating in the Sacrament" (*GIRM*, 82).

The exchange of peace among the faithful is a sign of unity as well as a wish that Christ's peace dwell in the other person. The exchange of peace is not a time to greet old friends or for small talk. The *General Instruction* offers the reminder that the sign of peace is offered "only to those who are nearest and in a sober manner" (*GIRM*, 82).

The Fraction. During the Fraction, the consecrated Bread is broken and placed on the patens; the consecrated Wine is poured into the chalices. The *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God) litany "accompanies the fraction and, for this reason, may be repeated as many times as necessary until the rite has reached its conclusion, the last time ending with the words *dona nobis pacem* (*grant us peace*)" (*GIRM*, 83).

Invitation to Communion. Bishop Blaire has determined, in accord with the U.S. adaptation for *GIRM*, n. 43, that in the Diocese of Stockton, the faithful will remain standing after the *Agnus Dei*. This decision not only maintains the universal posture of standing found in *GIRM* 43, it preserves the flow of the rite and manifests the assembly's belief in the resurrected Lord.

The Communion Procession. The reception of Communion by the faithful who are properly disposed is the climax of the Rite of Communion and "that more perfect form of participation in the Mass" (*GIRM*, 13). The Lord's invitation to eat his Body and drink his Blood sustains sacramentally the faithful in their relationship with him (John 6:53–57). Those who are in irregular marriages, or not in communion with the Catholic Church, or for some other reason are unable to receive Communion are invited to make a spiritual communion.

The Communion procession is precisely that—a procession of God's people symbolizing their journey to the heavenly banquet. Unlike a line of individuals going to "get" something, the assembly of the faithful, made a new creation through the waters of baptism, processes together to the altar to receive spiritual food and drink. The assembly, the body of Christ, receives the Body of Christ.

Nearly every facet of the Communion procession promotes the unity of the faithful with the risen Lord and with one another. The priest and people receive from

bread and wine consecrated at that celebration (*GIRM*, 85). A song is sung by the assembly throughout the entire Communion procession, beginning when the priest receives Communion and ending when the last person receives Communion. The *General Instruction* says that the purpose of the Communion song

is to express the communicants' union in spirit by means of the unity of their voices, to show joy of heart, and to highlight more clearly the "communitarian" nature of the procession to receive Communion. The singing is continued for as long as the Sacrament is being administered to the faithful (*GIRM*, 86).

What the *General Instruction* says of the Communion song applies equally to the assembly's posture during the Communion procession. In number 43, the *General Instruction* states that the assembly stands for the Communion procession.¹ By standing and singing together, the faithful show forth the Church's faith in the resurrected Christ and support their brothers and sisters who eat and drink the Body and Blood of the Lord. Standing together until all have received Communion signifies solidarity in Christ with one another..

While not new in the Church's teaching, this "communitarian" understanding of the Communion procession may be new—and even unsettling—for many. Communion (literally "union with") is a deeply personal—but never individual—encounter with the risen Lord and our brothers and sisters who form the body of Christ in the world. If infirmity or sickness makes it difficult for someone to remain standing for the entire Communion procession, then of course he or she should be seated. No one is bound to the impossible. For the vast majority of the faithful, however, standing and singing during the Communion procession manifests communion with the Lord through communion with our brothers and sisters (cf. Matthew 25:31–46).

Before receiving either the Body or Blood of Christ, communicants make a bow of the head as a sign of reverence to Christ's presence in the sacred species (*GIRM*, 160). To maintain the flow of the procession, each communicant is encouraged to make the sign of reverence while the person in front of them is receiving Communion from the minister.

Communicants may receive the Body of Christ either in the hand or on the tongue. The minister says, "The body of Christ." The communicant responds, "Amen." This is a ritual dialogue; no other words may be used.

When receiving in the hand, the communicant should be guided by the words of St. Cyril of Jerusalem: "When you approach, take care not to do so with your hand stretched out and your fingers open or apart, but rather place your left hand as a throne beneath your

right, as befits one who is about to receive the King.

Then receive him, taking care that nothing is lost."²

The Communion procession ends when the last person receives Communion. At that time, the faithful may sit or kneel in silence (U.S. adaptation). The importance of this period of silence cannot be emphasized enough. Silence means no song or instrumental music. The period of silence should be significant, permitting all the faithful time to pray. A song of the assembly may be sung at the conclusion of the period of silence. Generally, it is inappropriate for the choir to sing a "meditation" piece for the assembly at this time.

The Prayer after Communion. The prayer after Communion brings the Rite of Communion and the Liturgy of the Eucharist to conclusion. The assembly stands for the prayer.

Concluding Rite

The Concluding Rite, like the Introductory Rites, serves as a transition. Brief announcements may be made from a place other than the ambo.

On more festive occasions, the priest may pray a solemn blessing or prayer over the people. The deacon (or in his absence, the priest) then announces the conclusion of the celebration and sends the assembly forth to proclaim the gospel to the world.

Notes

¹ "The faithful should stand from the beginning of the Entrance chant, or while the priest approaches the altar, until the end of the Collect; for the *Alleluia* chant before the Gospel; while the Gospel itself is proclaimed; during the Profession of Faith and the Prayer of the Faithful; from the invitation, *Orate, fratres* (*Pray, brethren*), before the prayer over the offerings until the end of Mass, except at the places indicated below." Those exceptions include, in the United States, kneeling during the Eucharistic Prayer and after the Agnus Dei (unless the diocesan bishop determines otherwise, which Bishop Blaire has for the Diocese of Stockton), and sitting or kneeling during the "period of sacred silence after Communion is observed" (*GIRM*, 43).

² *Norms for the Celebration and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America*, 14 June 2001, n. 41.

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