



The Laity's Mass Obligations—Part III by Joe Sixpack

Okay, so we've established that Jesus gave His Church the authority to tell us how we are to worship God in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. So let's finish this by covering what I think (my opinion) is the worst abuse commonly committed during Mass.

I'd like to begin by quoting the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) again. "Attention must therefore be paid to what is determined by this *General Instruction* and by the traditional practice of the Roman Rite and to what serves the common spiritual good of the People of God, **rather than private inclination or arbitrary choice**" (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, Chapter 2 ¶42. Emphasis mine.). The emphasis is what I want to draw your attention to.

This is perhaps the worst of all common abuses during the Mass; so much so that many priests exclude it from the Mass. No priest is obligated to keep this part in the Mass, as it's optional for him, and many exclude it because of the abuses. I'm talking about the way many people conduct themselves during Rite of Peace.

Remember, Jesus is already on the altar, so decorum and respect are necessary. The proper way to do the sign of peace is to embrace the hand of the person to either side of you *only*, while softly saying, "Peace be with you." The GIRM says, "[I]t is appropriate that each person, in a sober manner, offer the sign of peace only to those who are nearest" (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, Chapter 11 ¶82).

There is to be no moving about, waving to your friends, moving across the isle, turning to the people behind you, kissing, or anything else. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is divine worship, not a social event. *The Rite of Peace is symbolic and **not** about us.* The entire Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is all about God and the way He, our Creator, demands to be worshipped with the perfect sacrifice initiated by His Son on Calvary to fulfill the old covenant's imperfect sacrifices by establishing the new covenant. When we move about, wave to our friends, move across the isle, turn to the people behind us, kiss, or anything else, we make the Mass about us and no longer give the just emphasis due to God.

Disclaimer: This final item is *my opinion only*, but I have a very strong theological basis for this personal opinion. It is my fervent hope and prayer that our bishops will one day change this abuse (again, my opinion), and that you will give it very prayerful consideration for your life.

I'm talking about receiving Communion in the hand. Yes, our Bishops have declared that you have that right, as long as the celebrating priest allows it. But, again in my opinion, it is wrong on so many levels. Let's begin by giving a little background to this controversy.

During the pontificate of Paul VI (at this writing he is Blessed, but in October of 2018 he'll become Saint Paul VI), there was a lot of unauthorized post-Vatican II liturgical experimentation by misguided priests. One of the unauthorized experiments was the practice of Communion in the hand. Bl. Paul VI was so insulated by those around him that by the time he learned of this illicit practice it was already widespread. In fact, the abuse was so widespread that he was forced to make a pastoral decision... one he really didn't want to make.

Bl. Paul VI reasoned that if he put his foot down and tried to stop this illicit action, it was so widespread and accepted by the laity that their would be massive rebellion and confusion, so the Holy Father did the only thing he felt he could at the time. He went ahead and legitimized the practice, with the intention of gradually reversing things until the practice was fully illicit again.

So why didn't subsequent popes change it back to the way it was? I don't know, but we do know where Paul VI's immediate successor's heart was on the issue. St. John Paul II would not confer Communion to anyone in the hand; he would only communicate communicants on the tongue.

The beginning of the theological arguments in favor of Communion on the tongue is found in the ordination of a priest. Part of the ordination ritual is for the ordaining bishop to anoint the hands of the ordinand with a special blessing. The reason for this is, only that anointing makes the hands of the priest worthy to touch the Body of Our Lord. Due to the practice of Communion in the hand being made licit, the USCCB's official explanation of this anointing of a priest's hands has been changed, but what I wrote supra was the original explanation.

I know that many priests today have no problem with Communion in the hand, but the overwhelming majority of priests I know believe it to be an abomination. But until their bishops outlaw the practice in their dioceses, they will continue to allow parishioners to continue the practice. I believe the reason bishops won't restrict Communion in the hand is because they don't want to have to field lots of complaints from the laity.

However, the Eucharistic landscape may be showing signs of shifting. On April 23, 2017, Bishop Robert Morlino of the Diocese of Madison, Wisconsin asked his entire diocese to begin receiving Holy Communion on the tongue, while kneeling, so as to increase reverence for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. And I suspect the majority of US bishops will follow suit, if Bishop Morlino is able to get his diocese to make a relatively smooth transition. This is a wise and faithful move on Bishop Morlino's part, I think, as 70% of Catholics no longer believe in the Real Presence, placing themselves firmly in Protestant territory.

At any rate, we've finished taking a look at the Catholic laity's responsibilities for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, because this is What We Believe... Why We Believe It.

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