

## Pastor's Notes: Receiving Holy Communion

November 29, 2020

Bishop Stika has issued a decree with revised directives for Mass that goes into effect this weekend, with the First Sunday of Advent. With this decree, the standard health protocols remain in place, including social distancing, face masks, hand sanitizer, and staying home if you have recent COVID symptoms or exposure. The dispensation from the Sunday Mass obligation will continue. However, the Bishop's decree allows something very significant that many have been awaiting since the pandemic began early this year, namely, the option of receiving Holy Communion on the tongue. Take note that this option is being made available with as many safeguards and precautions as possible to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, and it is being made available because of the Church's consistent teaching on this manner of reception of Holy Communion. No one should feel obliged to receive Communion on the tongue, and it should be reiterated that reception of Holy Communion on the hand is not evil and can be done with dignity and reverence, which I will speak more about below. This option will be available only on the Sacred Heart side of the altar rail (the right side, when looking at the altar from the pews). If you are uncomfortable with the people next to you receiving on the tongue, you may go to the Our Lady side (to the left of the altar, when looking at the altar from the pews), where Communion will not be given on the tongue. Note that we will be purifying our fingers in between each time Communion is given on the tongue, using rubbing alcohol.

In order to understand this revised decree, it's important to understand the practical theology surrounding the reception of Holy Communion. There is an adage that we use in the liturgy: *lex orandi, lex credendi*, which means: the way in which we pray indicates that which we believe. The inverse of this is also true. Our actions must correspond to our beliefs. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches the following about Holy Communion:

1362 The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the making present and the sacramental offering of his unique sacrifice, in the liturgy of the Church which is his Body. In all the Eucharistic Prayers we find after the words of institution a prayer called the anamnesis or memorial.

1365 Because it is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the Eucharist is also a sacrifice. The sacrificial character of the Eucharist is manifested in the very words of institution: "This is my body which is given for you" and "This cup which is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood." In the Eucharist Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which he "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

1374 ... In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist "the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained." "This presence is called 'real' - by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present."

If this is our belief, what, then, should be our practice? If the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ, should we not treat it differently from common food? As I have repeated many times in the past, the Church's universal preference has been discerned through the centuries with the development of doctrine and practice to be Communion administered on the tongue. For various reasons, some of them good, some of them not well-thought-out, the practice of Communion on the hand was introduced after the Second Vatican Council. As I have mentioned in another pastor's notes, there are various problems with this. However, it should be noted that in the United States, this is a legitimate option for the faithful and seems to be the most common practice among most Catholics in our country. Especially in this worldwide pandemic, there has been a reasonable request that Communion be offered in this manner more frequently, owing to the nature of the disease. However, we ought not forget to emphasize the need for reverence and dignity, even if we choose to receive Communion in this way that the Church has allowed us. I believe that one of the biggest problems with the introduction of Communion in the hand has been the lessening of an understanding of the Eucharist as a unique spiritual food, because it has been received in the manner we take ordinary food. As a pastor who has distributed Communion frequently in many different places over many years, I have noticed many people receiving Communion without discernment. They do so in a seemingly flippant way. Their actions don't correspond to the Reality that we believe is present. They reach up and grab the Eucharist with their fingers, without allowing the priest to place it in the palm of their hand. They receive Communion and immediately turn and walk away and only put the Host in their mouth at some distance from the priest, as if it were take-away food to be eaten on-the-go. When the Church gives the option of reception of Communion on the hand, we often quote 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" (41). Again, in my pastoral experience, more often than not, the Blessed Sacrament is not treated as if one were about to receive the King, but more akin to receiving common food and treated accordingly. However, we can confront this by constantly evaluating the way in which we receive Holy Communion and trying to overcome this deficiency in the form of reception. It is my hope that this present crisis might bear the fruit of an intense re-evaluation and examination of the central act of Christian worship, so that our actions and our beliefs might be in accord with each other.

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