

Pastor's Notes: Receiving Holy Communion, Part 2

December 6, 2020

Last week, I wrote about the manner in which we receive Holy Communion. Again, we recall that the way we do things speaks volumes about what it is we actually believe about that thing. It is my opinion that the breakdown of traditional piety around the reception of Holy Communion has contributed to the breakdown in belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. For that reason, last week I called for an intense re-evaluation and examination of this central act of Christian worship, so that our actions and our beliefs might be in accord with each other. This coronavirus pandemic has been a great catalyst for us in re-evaluating and understanding in a deeper way the great gift that is the Blessed Sacrament.

There are two legitimate ways to receive Holy Communion, as taught by our holy mother, the Church. The first is the traditional and universal norm of reception of Holy Communion directly on the tongue. This is the way that the Church over many centuries has discerned is the best for safeguarding the Sacred Reality being received, as well as protecting against various sacrileges that are associated with other manners of receiving. As a pastor, I am charged with protecting the Blessed Sacrament from profanation, and it is not an uncommon practice for people with nefarious intentions to try and "steal a host", or for the uninitiated, out of just pure ignorance to take a host and, not knowing what to do with it, leave it in the pew, throw it in the trash, even feed it to dogs. These are just some of the practical reasons why the Church has continued to insist on this universal practice. However, the reality of the coronavirus has given us an opportunity to re-examine the second option the Church has given to us in the United States, by way of a special permission granted in the 1960s. This second way is called receiving Holy Communion "on the hand", but as I have mentioned in other pastor's notes, the Church has had serious reservations about this manner of receiving Holy Communion (cf *Memoriale Domini* 1969) and the worries of what it could lead to: the lessening of Eucharistic piety and belief. However, should one choose to receive Holy Communion in this manner, there is a proper way to do so. The Church quotes 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).

As an ironic note, St. Cyril belonged to an Eastern Church, and to my knowledge, no Eastern church today offers Communion in the manner he described, all having at a certain point preferred receiving Communion in the mouth. Many of them use a sacred spoon to deposit the Sacred Host and Precious Blood into the mouth of the children of God. However, if the Church has discerned in certain places by way of experiment that we should offer this practice to the faithful, it behooves us to do so in a manner that does not lend itself to a lessening of Eucharistic piety. In many places, I have seen how quickly reception of Communion in the hand leads to an indifference— and even unintentional desecration of the Blessed Sacrament— by people who, most of the time, do not know any better. How many times have I seen the Sacred Body of our Precious Lord popped into one's mouth as if it were a piece of gum, or distractedly picked up as if it were a potato chip, or placed into a single outstretched hand as if I were just handing out a piece of candy or change from a purchase. When we do the same gestures associated with profane things, it seems only natural that our mind and spirit would follow suit and think of the Eucharist in profane terms. Therefore, I would like to encourage practices that correspond with our Catholic faith in the Real Presence.

We should re-read St. Cyril's admonition every time we intend to receive Holy Communion on the hand. I also recommend, instead of reaching around with your fingers and picking up the Host and putting it on your tongue, to rather bend down and receive directly from your hand on your tongue, making a gesture of bending the head, not of bringing the hand up, as if we were popping food into our mouth.

Another thing that I would like to introduce for those who would care to go the extra mile is that of a personal hand corporal that can receive the Host without touching your hand, and then in the same manner as described above, you bend over and receive the Host directly on your tongue from the corporal. If this hand corporal is utilized, it must be cared for in an appropriate way. Any visible particles should be consumed immediately. Then, fold the corporal, lest any unseen particles remain. And care for it in a reverent manner, such as placing in a breast pocket or into a Rosary case— but one need not be overly scrupulous about this. To launder it, simply take it home, soak it in water for a few minutes. If there are any particles of the Blessed Sacrament, they will have dissolved into the water. Wring out the corporal and launder it as normal. Take the water and place it directly in the ground. A good idea is to place it in a flower bed or some place of beauty. We will make these hand corporals available in the vestibule, with a suggested donation of \$1, as they are made of linen. It is my hope that we can take the opportunity this coronavirus gives to us, once again, to grow in our piety and love for our Eucharistic Lord.



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