

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

How Do We Receive Communion?

As we mark the Feast of Corpus Christi, celebrating the Body and Blood of Christ, it's a good time for a refresher course on the reception of Holy Communion.

Giving out the Body of Christ over the last several years, I've seen it all. So let's go to the source, the Catholic bishops, and find out what they have to say on the topic. From the USCCB (my emphasis added):

The General Instruction asks each country's Conference of Bishops to determine the posture to be used for the reception of Communion and the act of reverence to be made by each person as he or she receives Communion. In the United States, the body of Bishops determined that Communion should be received standing, and that a bow is the act of reverence made by those receiving. These norms may require some adjustment on the part of those who have been used to other practices, however the significance of unity in posture and gesture as a symbol of our unity as members of the one body of Christ should be the governing factor in our own actions.

Those who receive Communion may receive either in the hand or on the tongue, and the decision should be that of the individual receiving, not of the person distributing Communion. If Communion is received in the hand, the hands should first of all be clean. If one is right-handed the left hand should rest upon the right. The host will then be laid in the palm of the left hand and then taken by the right hand to the mouth. If one is left-handed this is reversed. It is not appropriate to reach out with the fingers and take the host from the person distributing.

The person distributing Communion says audibly to each person approaching, "The Body of Christ." This formula should not be altered, as it is a proclamation which calls for a response of faith on the part of the one who receives. The communicant should audibly respond, "Amen," indicating by that response his or her belief that this small wafer of bread [is] in reality the body of Christ the Lord.

There are a few additional guidelines that I think might be helpful, from my experience:

- If you are wearing gloves, take them off. We take off gloves to shake hands with someone; take them off to receive the Body of Christ! Also, it is too easy for particles to stick to stray threads.
- Consume the host the moment you receive it. You shouldn't take it and walk away. Place the host on your tongue before it has a chance to slip through your hands to the floor.
- Place one hand over the other to receive (see the directive above). Don't cup your hands or form a "V." It's too easy to lose the host that way. "Make of your hands a throne" was good advice 1,800 years ago, and good advice now.

Above all, be mindful of what you are receiving—This is Jesus who loves us. The Eucharist remains the greatest gift, the "source and summit" of our faith, and we shouldn't approach Holy Communion like we are standing in line at the DMV.

St. Augustine put it beautifully in one of his sermons: If you are the body and members of Christ, then it is your sacrament that is placed on the table of the Lord; it is your sacrament that you receive. To that which you are you respond "Amen" ("yes, it is true!") and by responding to it you assent to it. For you hear the words, "the Body of Christ" and respond "Amen." Be then a member of the Body of Christ that your Amen may be true." Amen!

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*Detail of The Disputa by Marion Rzeznik
(in collaboration with Gonippo Raggi)
Corpus Christi Church, Buffalo, NY*