

Things I've Seen and Heard

Musings of Fr. Bryan T. Reif

Recently I was asked a question for clarification about how to properly present oneself for Holy Communion, and how to properly receive. There are indeed norms spelled out in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal as well as the Rubrics for Mass that give specific direction regarding the posture, the words to be said, and the demeanor both of the minister and the recipient of Holy Communion.

Let's begin with the pertinent paragraph in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal:

160. The Priest then takes the paten or ciborium and approaches the communicants, who usually come up in procession. It is not permitted for the faithful to take the consecrated Bread or the sacred chalice by themselves and, still less, to hand them on from one to another among themselves. The norm established for the Dioceses of the United States of America is that Holy Communion is to be received standing, unless an individual member of the faithful wishes to receive Communion while kneeling (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Instruction, Redemptionis Sacramentum, March 25, 2004, no. 91). When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the Sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister. The consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant. When Holy Communion is received under both kinds, the sign of reverence is also made before receiving the Precious Blood.

Here note that the norm for receiving is standing, unless an individual communicant wishes to kneel. If someone wishes to kneel to receive, that person will not be impeded. It should be noted that while the Liturgical Documents favor standing as the norm, and the worship space in church should be arranged to foster that norm, one is not superior to the other.

In the rubrics themselves, within the Communion Rite, the Words of the priest, deacon, or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion will be simply the prayer "The Body of Christ" or "The Blood of Christ". The minister should not state a name, add to, subtract from, or say anything other than these words of prayer proscribed by the liturgical text. The Communicant, having shown reverence to the Real Presence by a bow of the head, then responds to the prayer of the minister by responding "Amen". This expression of faith, replying "Amen" to the prayer is essential, in that it expresses faith not only in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist that us being received, Christ's Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, but it also expresses that, because Holy Communion is also a Sacrament

of Unity, that we believe that we, in communion with one another and the whole Church, are The Body of Christ.

Note also that Holy Communion can be received either on the tongue or in the hand, and that neither is seen in any way as superior to the other. It is at the discretion of the individual communicant how he or she wishes to receive, either in the hand or on the tongue. Regardless, it is important that one not move until the Sacred Host is in your hand, or on your tongue, and the priest's or minister's hand has moved away before you move. You should consume the Sacred Host in the presence of the priest or minister who has distributed Holy Communion to you.

A word about intinction, or the dipping of the Sacred Host into the Precious Blood. This is not permitted in the Roman Rite because the Communicant is not to take Communion for themselves, as would be the case if one dipped the Sacred Host into the Chalice of their own accord. Communicants are to receive. Also, with intinction, there is a definite danger of dripping the Precious Blood of Our Lord onto the floor. During the pandemic, you may have noticed concelebrating priests using intinction, but a priest who is concelebrating always self-communicates, and intinction was permitted for priests during the pandemic. Intinction always is self-communication of the Sacred Species. The lay Faithful are to never self-communicate.

Hopefully that clears up the question that was posed to me, and gives us all some food for thought, and helps us to be more conscious, and deliberate in our approach to receiving Our Lord in Holy Communion at Mass.

Take Good Care,

Fr. Bryan