



June 3, 2026

Bishop Timothy Senior's Pastoral Letter for Corpus Christi Sunday

DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Each year, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ leads us to reflect more deeply on our participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice of the Lord and how that participation might profoundly influence our lives. This special day celebrates the great gift of the Most Blessed Sacrament by which Christ is present among us and through which we are united to Him and one another. During our earthly lives, sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ yields the richest and most intimate expression of communion with the Lord and the Church.

Throughout the Diocese of Harrisburg, I see great devotion afforded to the worship of the Eucharistic Mystery within and outside of Mass. Periods of Eucharistic adoration and perpetual adoration chapels draw so many of us to fall on our knees in prayer and gratitude. I am edified by the way in which so many of you receive Holy Communion with devotion and affection. Without a doubt, we reverently celebrate the presence of the Lord among us in this Holy Sacrament. Nevertheless, it is helpful to be reminded from time to time of a few aspects of our reception of Holy Communion.

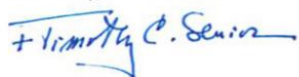
I encourage you to receive Holy Communion regularly and worthily, that is, free of mortal sin and properly disposed to receive the graces that flow forth from this Sacrament. Each of us is called to take care not to be distracted, not only during Mass, but especially as we approach the altar of the Lord. The Communion procession leads us to the altar and should be accompanied by a prayerful disposition and outward participation in the Communion chant. Singing as we approach the Lord can help us to be sure our minds and hearts are prepared to receive Him with joy.

As you approach the moment of reception, whether receiving under the form of the Sacred Host or from the chalice, it is appropriate to make a proper gesture of a bow of the head prior to receiving Holy Communion. And, when the priest, deacon, or extraordinary minister announces, "The Body of Christ" or "The Blood of Christ," respond with a firm and clear "Amen." So much is contained in this one word! You are proclaiming your belief that Christ is truly present in the Most Blessed Sacrament. You are affirming that by this Sacrament you share in the life and are in communion with the Church. You accept with faith the grace poured out into your heart that, as Saint Augustine has said, makes us what we consume. It is necessary to respond, "Amen!"

According to the discipline of the Church, it is permissible to reverently receive Holy Communion either in the hand or on the tongue. But great care must be taken in both manners. With clean and uncovered hands, after creating a throne for the King of Heaven, one should consume the Sacred Host immediately before walking away from the minister and careful not to allow any particle to fall to the ground. For those who receive upon the tongue, hear the counsel of the Psalmist who tells us, "Open wide your mouth and I will fill it" (81:10).

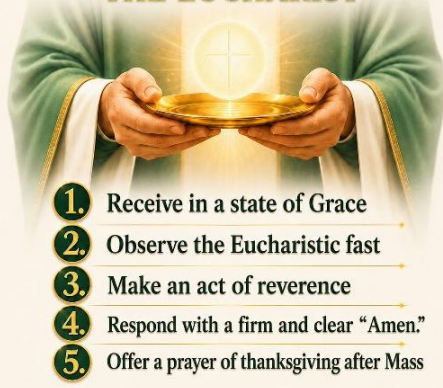
It remains the law of the Church that reception follows an hour-long fast, knowing that only water and medicine may be received within the hour of Holy Communion. Any other food or drink, including coffee and gum, breaks the fast. Carefully adhering to the fast helps us to remember that this is no ordinary food or drink, but the Food of Heaven, the Bread of Angels, the very Body and Blood of the Lord Himself. Indeed, this immense gift of God's love nourishes us on our journey through this life. Pope Saint John Paul II said it best: "The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth. It is a glorious ray of the heavenly Jerusalem which pierces the clouds of our history and lights up our journey." Jesus wants us to realize that He is with us. His presence makes all the difference. In the Blessed Sacrament, He is with us hidden in the form of bread and wine. Let us strive to receive Him reverently and well.

Sincerely in Christ,



Most Reverend Timothy C. Senior
Bishop of Harrisburg

5 THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN RECEIVING THE EUCHARIST



The unique, Sacramental Presence of the Resurrected Christ remains with us after we receive Him in Holy Communion!

"The Eucharistic presence of Christ begins at the moment of the consecration and endures as long as the Eucharistic species subsist. Christ is present whole and entire in each of the species and whole and entire in each of their parts, in such a way that the breaking of the bread does not divide Christ." (CCC 1377)

Jesus' unique Eucharistic presence remains with us for as long as the species of bread and/or wine remain within us after Holy Communion. As our bodies digest the Eucharist and the species of bread and wine no longer remain, Christ's sacramental presence also ceases.

The good news is that even after this unique Eucharistic presence passes, the Holy Trinity continues to dwell spiritually within those who remain in the state of grace. God continues to live within us as in a temple.

This teaching of the Church reveals the great value of the moments following Holy Communion. After receiving the Eucharist, each of us is like Mary at the Annunciation when she said "Yes" to the angel's invitation to become the Mother of the Lord. When we receive the Eucharist under the form of bread or wine—or both—we become living tabernacles of Jesus Christ: true God and true man, with His divine nature, human soul, precious blood, and glorified body.

During these sacred moments, the communicant becomes a "living tabernacle," allowing for intimate prayer and deep union with Christ.

Use This Time to Reflect in the Presence of the Risen Christ Within You!

Imagine Mary preparing herself to be reunited with her Son in this profound way. Imagine the loving attention she gave to Jesus in every Holy Communion. What joy it must have brought her to have her Son dwelling within her again! May Mary be our model in the way we receive the Eucharist.

Let us pray that we may welcome Jesus in every Holy Communion with the same love and devotion with which Mary received her Son. May the Eucharist cause our hearts to beat ever more in unison with Christ's, just as Mary's heart beat perfectly with His. — *A Biblical Walk Through the Mass*, pp. 142–143; *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 56

In addition, the final Blessing and Dismissal are not simply the end of Mass but are a sacred sending forth. From the words *Ite, missa est* - we derive the word "**Mass.**" The Mystical Body of Christ is sent into the world carrying the grace and blessings received in the Eucharist. The prayers and intentions brought to the altar are received and transformed (transubstantiated) by God's grace, and we are sent forth as apostles of that grace to our families, communities, and the world. If the liturgy itself takes its name from this sending forth, we should strongly consider remaining present to participate in that blessing and sending at the end of the liturgy.

