



MYSTERIES OF THE - MASS

A Series by Tom Paolucci,
Aspirant for Deacon



DISTRIBUTION OF THE EUCHARIST

The Eucharist, also known as Holy Communion, is the heart of Catholic worship and the summit of Christian life. As we partake in the Eucharist, we are united with Christ and the entire Church in a profound and mysterious way. This sacred tradition has deep roots in the history of the Church and is governed by specific liturgical norms to preserve its sanctity and meaning. For this week, the documentation section will be much more voluminous. *“The General Instructions of the Roman Missal (GIRM)”* and the *“Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds”* explain the governance of distribution for the Holy Eucharist in great detail.

The practice of distributing the Eucharist traces back to the Last Supper, where Jesus instituted this sacrament by breaking bread and sharing wine with His disciples, commanding them to “do this in memory of me” (Luke 22:19). The early Christians continued this practice, gathering in homes to break bread and celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Over centuries, this practice evolved into the structured liturgy we recognize today.

The distribution of the Eucharist is a sacred act that follows specific rules to ensure reverence and proper disposition among the faithful:

1. **Ministers of the Eucharist:** Only ordained Priests and Deacons are ordinary ministers of the Eucharist. However, laypersons, known as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, may assist in distributing the Eucharist when there are large congregations or a lack of ordained ministers.
2. **Proper Disposition:** Those who receive the Eucharist must be baptized Catholics in a state of grace, having confessed any mortal sins. Fasting for at least one hour before receiving Communion is also required, except for water and medicine.
3. **Manner of Receiving:** The faithful can receive the Eucharist either on the tongue or in the hand while standing or kneeling. The communicant should approach with reverence, make a gesture of respect (such as a bow), and respond *“Amen”* after the minister presents the host, saying, *“The Body of Christ.”*
4. **Receiving Both Species:** While it is sufficient to receive the host alone, the faithful may also receive from the chalice to partake fully in the sacramental sign of the Eucharist. When receiving the Precious Blood, the minister presents the chalice, saying, *“The Blood of Christ,”* to which the communicant responds, *“Amen.”*

Before receiving the Eucharist, the minister declares “The Body of Christ” or “The Blood of Christ,” affirming the true presence of Jesus in the consecrated elements. The communicant’s

response, “Amen,” is a declaration of faith, acknowledging the mystery and reality of Christ’s presence. This exchange underscores the profound belief in the Eucharist as not merely symbolic but a true sacramental participation in the Body and Blood of Christ.

DOCUMENTATION:

General Instructions to the Roman Missal (GIRM 85): It is most desirable that the faithful, just as the Priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord’s Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and that, in the cases where this is foreseen, they partake of the chalice (cf. no. 283), so that even by means of the signs Communion may stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated.

General Instructions to the Roman Missal (GIRM 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.

Congregation For Divine Worship and The Discipline of the Sacraments, Redemptionis Sacramentum (P91): In distributing Holy Communion it is to be remembered that “sacred ministers may not deny the sacraments to those who seek them in a reasonable manner, are rightly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them”. Hence any baptized Catholic who is not prevented by law must be admitted to Holy Communion. Therefore, it is not licit to deny Holy Communion to any of Christ’s faithful solely on the grounds, for example, that the person wishes to receive the Eucharist kneeling or standing.

General Instructions to the Roman Missal (GIRM 161): If Communion is given only under the species of bread, the Priest raises the host slightly and shows it to each, saying, *The Body of Christ*. The communicant replies, *Amen*, and receives the Sacrament either on the tongue or, where this is allowed, in the hand, the choice lying with the communicant. As soon as the communicant receives the host, he or she consumes the whole of it. If, however, Communion is given under both kinds, the rite prescribed in nos. 284-287 is to be followed.

General Instructions to the Roman Missal (GIRM 162): In the distribution of Communion the Priest may be assisted by other Priests who happen to be present. If such Priests are not present and there is a truly large number of communicants, the Priest may call upon extraordinary ministers to assist him, that is, duly instituted acolytes or even other faithful who have been duly deputed for this purpose. In case of necessity, the Priest may depute suitable faithful for this

single occasion. These ministers should not approach the altar before the Priest has received Communion, and they are always to receive from the hands of the Priest Celebrant the vessel containing the species of the Most Holy Eucharist for distribution to the faithful.

General Instructions to the Roman Missal (GIRM 281): Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it takes place under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clearer expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the connection between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Kingdom of the Father.

General Instructions to the Roman Missal (GIRM 282): Sacred pastors should take care to ensure that the faithful who participate in the rite or are present at it, are made aware by the most suitable means possible of the Catholic teaching on the form of Holy Communion as laid down by the Ecumenical Council of Trent. Above all, they should instruct the Christian faithful that the Catholic faith teaches that Christ, whole and entire, and the true Sacrament, is received even under only one species, and hence that as regards the resulting fruits, those who receive under only one species are not deprived of any grace that is necessary for salvation. Furthermore, they should teach that the Church, in her administration of the Sacraments, has the power to lay down or alter whatever provisions, apart from the substance of the Sacraments, that she judges to be more readily conducive to reverence for the Sacraments and the good of the recipients, in view of changing conditions, times, and places. However, at the same time the faithful should be instructed to participate more readily in this sacred rite, by which the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is made more fully evident.

General Instructions to the Roman Missal (GIRM 284): When Communion is distributed under both kinds:

- a) the chalice is usually administered by a Deacon or, in the absence of a Deacon, by a Priest, or even by a duly instituted acolyte or another extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, or by one of the faithful who, in a case of necessity, has been entrusted with this duty for a single occasion;
- b) whatever may remain of the Blood of Christ is consumed at the altar by the Priest or the Deacon or the duly instituted acolyte who ministered the chalice. The same then purifies, wipes, and arranges the sacred vessels in the usual way. Any of the faithful who wish to receive Holy Communion under the species of bread alone should be given Communion in this form.

General Instructions to the Roman Missal (GIRM 285): For Communion under both kinds the following should be prepared:

- a) If Communion from the chalice is done by drinking directly from the chalice, a chalice of a sufficiently large size or several chalices are prepared. However, care should be taken lest beyond what is needed of the Blood of Christ remains to be consumed at the end of the celebration.

b) If Communion from the chalice is done by intinction, the hosts should be neither too thin nor too small, but rather a little thicker than usual, so that after being intincted partly into the Blood of Christ they can still be easily distributed.

General Instructions to the Roman Missal (GIRM 286): If Communion of the Blood of Christ is carried out by communicants' drinking from the chalice, each communicant, after receiving the Body of Christ, moves to the minister of the chalice and stands facing him. The minister says, The Blood of Christ, the communicant replies, Amen, and the minister hands over the chalice, which the communicant raises to his or her mouth. Each communicant drinks a little from the chalice, hands it back to the minister, and then withdraws; the minister wipes the rim of the chalice with the purificator.

Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion (P38): If extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are required by pastoral need, they should not approach the altar before the Priest has received Communion. After the Priest has concluded his own Communion, he distributes Communion to the extraordinary ministers, assisted by the Deacon, and then hands the sacred vessels to them for distribution of Holy Communion to the people.

Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion (P39): Neither Deacons nor lay ministers may ever receive Holy Communion in the manner of a concelebrating Priest. The practice of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion waiting to receive Holy Communion until after the distribution of Holy Communion is not in accord with liturgical law.

Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion (P40): After all eucharistic ministers have received Communion, the bishop or Priest celebrant reverently hands vessels containing the Body or the Blood of the Lord to the Deacons or extraordinary ministers who will assist with the distribution of Holy Communion. The Deacon may assist the Priest in handing the vessels containing the Body and Blood of the Lord to the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion.

Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion (P41): Holy Communion under the form of bread is offered to the communicant with the words "The Body of Christ." The communicant may choose whether to receive the Body of Christ in the hand or on the tongue. When receiving in the hand, the communicant should be guided by the words of 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."*

Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion (P43): The chalice is offered to the communicant with the words "The Blood of Christ," to which the communicant responds, *"Amen."*

Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion (P44): The chalice may never be left on the altar or another place to be picked up by the communicant for self-communication (except in the case of concelebrating bishops or Priests), nor may the chalice be passed from one communicant to another. There shall always be a minister of the chalice.

Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion (P45): After each communicant has received the Blood of Christ, the minister carefully wipes both sides of the rim of the chalice with a purificator. This action is a matter of both reverence and hygiene. For the same reason, the minister turns the chalice slightly after each communicant has received the Precious Blood.

Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion (P46): It is the choice of the communicant, not the minister, to receive from the chalice.

Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion (P47): Children are encouraged to receive Communion under both kinds provided that they are properly instructed and that they are old enough to receive from the chalice.

Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion (P48): Distribution of the Precious Blood by a spoon or through a straw is not customary in the Latin dioceses of the United States of America.

Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion (P50): The communicant, including the extraordinary minister, is never allowed to self-communicate, even by means of intinction. Communion under either form, bread or wine, must always be given by an ordinary or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion.

The Mystery of Faith: A Study of the Structural Element of the Order of the Mass by Lawrence J. Johnston.

Credo: Compendium of the Catholic Faith by Bishop Athanasius Schneider.

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What sign tells us that Jesus is truly present in a Catholic Church?

The red sanctuary lamp, which burns night and day before the tabernacle whenever the Holy Eucharist is reserved there.