

THE RECEPTION OF COMMUNION

Processions

Processions are not a significant part of our contemporary experience. We witness parades – on civic and national holidays, in honor of a winning sports team or a hero of some kind. We witness, but for the most part do not take part in, more solemn processions, some with a degree of religious significance, such as those for funerals of fallen heroes or on the occasion of the inauguration of a head of state or the weddings of royalty or celebrities. All of these are gatherings of people in which there is movement from one place to another, usually accompanied by music and sometimes with a goal or destination, although in some the point of arrival is less important than the movement itself. And we do participate in “lines” – at ATM machines; in supermarkets; to obtain tickets to a significant sports event or a highly touted new gadget or book. But while all of these experiences share some of the characteristics of our processions in the liturgy, none of them can be compared with these symbolic religious actions. In the Eucharistic liturgy there are three processions, each with its own purpose: The Entrance Procession helps those who gather for the Eucharist to form a community, an Assembly of believers, and sets the tone for the liturgical feast or season being celebrated. In the Procession with the Gifts representatives of the Assembly bring forth the bread and wine, gifts representing the self-giving of those present, gifts that will become the body and blood of the Lord. In the Communion Procession, these humble gifts of bread and wine, now transformed into the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, are given back to God’s people as spiritual nourishment to strengthen them on the journey of life.

The Communion Procession

The Communion Procession is a religious action, a religious event. It is not the same as “standing in line” or viewing a parade. In the Procession to receive Holy Communion, the Assembly of

believers, already united by the life of Christ they share through Baptism, move forward to receive the body and blood of Christ who, in this sacrament, unites them even more closely with himself and with each other. For this reason the Church describes this procession as an action that both signifies and fosters our unity with Christ and with one another. In the Communion Procession we move toward the Gift we are to receive with solemnity and with the dignity befitting the redeemed children of God.

The Hymn at Communion

The ritual for Communion calls for a hymn to be sung, a hymn that begins as the priest receives Communion and lasts until the last person has received. This hymn represents the communal thanksgiving of the Assembly gathered for Mass, and needs to be carefully chosen. Its purpose is to *express the communicants’ union in spirit by means of the unity of their voices, to show joy of heart, and to highlight more clearly the “communitarian” nature of the procession to receive Communion.* (GIRM n.86) Since the hymn accompanies movement, it should be active rather than meditative in its rhythm. It is often helpful to select music that has a sung refrain, easily remembered by the congregation, and verses that can be sung by a choir or cantor. If there is no music at Mass and the Communion Hymn is not sung, (for example at weekday Masses) the Communion Antiphon is recited by the faithful or by a lector. If it is said by none of these, it is recited by the priest himself after his own reception of Communion and before he distributes Communion to the faithful.

The Reception of Communion

When the individual receiving Communion reaches the Communion station, a gesture of reverence, (in the United States a bow of the head), is made. This bow should not be done before reaching the station as in that case the significance of the act of reverence directed to the consecrated host and consecrated

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wine is lost and the act appears to be directed to the back of the person ahead. The Church allows to each individual the option of receiving the host on the tongue or in the hand. Both options are permitted; neither is preferred. If Communion is received in the hand, the right hand should be placed under the left hand which is held palm open and facing upward. The host is then placed in the left hand and the communicant takes it with his or her right hand and places it in the mouth. A person who is left-handed reverses the hands so that the right hand rests on the left hand, and the left hand brings the host to the mouth.

Communion Under Both Forms

Communion offered both under the form of bread and the form of wine is strongly encouraged because

in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clear expressing is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the relationship between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Father's Kingdom. (GIRM n. 281). At the same time, it is also important to understand that there will be circumstances (as, for example an extremely large number of communicants), when it will not be practical to distribute Communion from the cup. In considering this issue, the teaching of the Church should be made clear: Christ is present, whole and entire in the consecrated bread and in the consecrated wine, so that a person who receives under one form but not the other is not deprived of any grace.

