

QUESTIONS ABOUT POSTURE...

Q: What is the “sign of reverence” for communion?

A: A 1967 Roman document permitted bishops of a country to determine practices related to the Eucharist. The document stated that it was appropriate that a communicant, when receiving communion standing, make a sign of reverence, to be determined according to local culture. The US bishops state that a “bow of the head” is the normative sign of reverence both before receiving the consecrated host and before drinking from the chalice.

Q: What is the posture for receiving Communion?

A: The norm for the reception of Holy Communion in the dioceses of the United States is standing. Communicants should not be denied Holy Communion because they kneel. Rather, such instances should be addressed pastorally, by providing the faithful with the proper catechesis on the reasons for this norm.

Q: Should people stand or kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer?

A: In the dioceses of the United States, they should kneel beginning after the Holy, Holy, until after the Amen of the Eucharistic Prayer, except when prevented on occasion by reasons of health, lack of space, the large number of people present or some other good reason. Those who do not kneel ought to make a profound bow when the priest genuflects after the words of institution.

Kneeling is a posture of reverence, openness and humility. We kneel before Christ really and truly present in the Eucharist. We do this in both awe and supplication. It is for this reason that the Bishops of the United States have chosen the posture of kneeling for the entire Eucharistic Prayer during the celebration of the Mass.

POSTURES FOR ALL THE PARTS OF THE MASS...

Q: What are the postures for the parts of Mass?

A: The posture of the people at mass has recently been clarified for the unity of the assembly throughout the celebration of the Eucharist

- Beginning of Mass until 1st Reading: Stand
- 1st Reading until Gospel Acclamation: Sit
- Gospel Acclamation to end of Gospel: Stand
- During the Homily: Sit
- Creed to end of General Intercessions: Stand
- Preparation of Gifts until completion of “Pray brothers and sisters...” : Sit
- Beginning of “May the Lord” to the Holy: Stand
- During the Eucharistic Prayer: Kneel
- Our Father to Lamb of God: Stand
- Completion of Lamb of God until distribution of Holy Communion: Kneel or Stand
- When receiving Holy Communion: Stand
- Silence after Holy Communion: Sit or Kneel
- Prayer after Communion to end of Mass: Stand

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DISTRIBUTION & RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION AND POSTURE DURING MASS



During the meal Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, “Take this and eat it,” he said, “this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.”

- Matthew 26:27-28

Background Information...

The renewal of the liturgy is the on going work of the Church and the People of God. The liturgy, in particular the Eucharistic Liturgy, is the center of the life of the church. Therefore, the Bishops of the United States of America advise unity in ritual posture and action as the course to be followed for all dioceses of the USA. The Office for Worship of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee presents this question and answer brochure as a way of addressing the most asked questions about topics related to the Mass today, with emphasis on questions regarding the Distribution of Holy Communion under both forms, and postures during the Eucharist.

For further reading . . .

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy from the Second Vatican Council, December 4, 1963.

Roman Missal, General Instruction (GIRM), 5th edition, 2002.

Norms for the Celebration and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America, approved USCCB June 28, 2002.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, United States Catholic Conference, Inc. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994.

Q: Are Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion really necessary at Mass?

A: While extraordinary ministers may never distribute Holy Communion when priests and deacons are present, their ministry is often needed to facilitate the distribution of Holy Communion “when the size of the congregation or the incapacity of the bishop, priest, or deacon requires it.” (*Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under Both Kinds*, no. 28) All should be grateful for the exemplary ministry provided by so many Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion throughout the dioceses of the United States of America.

Q: How does one receive the consecrated bread and the precious blood?

A: The faithful come forward for communion in the usual way. The communicant stands in front of the communion minister. Showing the consecrated host, the minister says, “The body of Christ.” The communicant bows the head (see question on Sign of Reverence) and answers, “Amen,” and receives the host on the tongue or in the hand. If receiving in the hand, the communicant places one hand, palm up, on the other. *Ancient writers called this gesture making a throne for Christ the King.* The host is placed on the top hand. The communicant takes the host with the hand that was under the other hand, places it in his/her mouth and consumes the host. The communicant then moves to the minister of the cup. The minister says, “The blood of Christ.” The communicant bows the head (see question on Sign of Reverence) and answers, “Amen,” and the minister holds out the chalice. For the sake of convenience, communicants may raise the chalice to their mouths themselves. The communicant drinks from the chalice, returns it to the minister, and then returns to his/her place. The communion minister wipes the outside and inside of the chalice rim with the purificator. This action is both a matter of courtesy and hygiene. It is also customary to move the chalice a quarter turn after each communicant for the same reason.

Q: How many communion ministers should be present for the distribution?

A: When communion is to be given under both kinds, generally there should be two ministers of the Precious Blood for each minister of the Consecrated Bread. In this way, the Communion Rite will not be unduly prolonged.

Q: May the ministers of the Precious Blood consume what is left at the end of Communion?

A: After the distribution of the Eucharist is complete, the ministers of the cup may consume what remains of the Precious Blood from their chalice of distribution. They do this at their place of distribution or at the altar and not while walking. The remaining Precious Blood is never to be poured out.

Q: What about germs and communicable diseases with reception of communion from the common cup?

A: The Bishop’s Committee on the Liturgy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in consultation with the Center for Disease Control of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has reported that to their knowledge there have never been any specific episodes or outbreaks of any illness that have been associated with the use of a common communion cup.

Q: I have seen people dip the host into the precious blood. Is this an acceptable practice?

A: No. This is, in effect, giving communion to oneself. Self-communication is not permitted. It is also unsanitary, since the bacteria on a person’s hands and fingers can easily be transmitted to the consecrated wine in the cup. In addition it increases the possibility that the consecrated host might be dropped while walking to the cup or that the consecrated wine might drip from the host. This practice is different from “intinction.” Intinction is a rarely utilized manner of administering communion in which a single minister offers the dipped host saying, “The Body and Blood of Christ” and places it on the tongue of the communicant.