

CALLED TO BE ONE IN HEART, MIND AND MOTION

We Are United In The Body of Christ



From the beginning, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, the most important church document regarding the Mass, tells us how important we are -- the community that celebrates each Sunday.

In addition, [there is] another reality of which much should be made, namely, the royal priesthood of believers. . . . For the celebration of the Eucharist is the action of the whole Church; in it all should do only, but all of, those parts that belong to them in virtue of their place within the people of God. . . . For these people are the people of God, purchased by Christ's blood, gathered together by the Lord, nourished by his word. They are a people called to offer God the prayers of the entire human family, a people giving thanks in Christ for the mystery of salvation by offering his sacrifice. Finally, they are a people growing together into unity by sharing in Christ's body and blood. These people are holy by their origin, but becoming ever more holy by conscious, active, and fruitful participation in the mystery of the Eucharist. (General Instruction, #5)

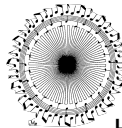
The celebration of the Eucharist is the action of the whole Church. **It is not something that the priest does alone while we watch.** Together with the priest/presider, we all celebrate the Mass. It is our privilege as the baptized, and the active attentive presence of each of us is vital.

One U.S. liturgical theologian explains the importance of the community at Mass this way:

The deeds are done not simply by one individual and another individual, but by the church here assembled. The body of Christ is proclaiming itself to be the body of Christ. The body of Christ -- you and me -- is identifying itself, remembering itself, preparing itself to live as Christ all week long. When we come into this room, we do not come to pray alone for an hour or so. We come to place ourselves beside brothers and sisters and to give all that we have to give to the work the church has to do here.

It is the church that listens to God's loving word, it is the church that then intercedes, it is the church that gives God thanks and praise over bread and wine, and it is the church that takes and is the holy communion. None of us does this alone, yet the church does nothing without each of us doing all we can.

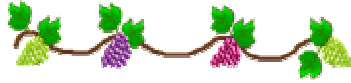
The Communion Hymn



This action by Christ's body, the Church assembled for the Eucharist, is manifested and supported by the Communion Hymn, a hymn in praise of Christ, sung by the united voices of those who believe in him and share his life. *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* takes this hymn very seriously, mandating that it should begin at the Communion of the priest and extend until the last person has received Communion. For some however, the singing of this hymn is perceived as an intrusion on their own prayer, their private thanksgiving after Communion. In fact, however, this hymn is prayer, the corporate thanksgiving prayer of the members of Christ's Body, united with one another. Over and over again, the prayers of the liturgy and the norms of the *General Instruction* emphasize this fundamental concept of the unity of the baptized, stressing that when we come together to participate in the Eucharistic celebration, we come not as individuals, but as united members of Christ's body. In each of the Eucharistic Prayers, though the petition is worded in slightly different ways, God is asked to send his Holy Spirit to make us one body, one spirit in Christ; the *General Instruction* admonishes the faithful that they should become **one body**, whether by hearing the Word of God or joining in prayers and **liturgical song**... (n. 96) it describes one of the purposes of the opening song of the Mass as to ... intensify the **unity of those who have assembled** and says of the Communion Song that its function is to express outwardly the **communicants union in spirit by means of the unity of their voices, and to highlight the communitarian character of the Communion procession.**

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An Act of Communion With Christ And One Another



It is difficult for some of us to embrace this emphasis on Mass as the action of a community rather than an individual act of my own faith piety, but it is important that we make every effort do so. Christ himself at the Last Supper pleaded with his Father: *Holy Father, keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one like us... Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you... Jn. 17:11;21.* Baptism has joined us to Christ and to one another as the vine and its branches. The life of Christ, the Holy Spirit, animates each of us individually, and all of us corporately and guides us together in our efforts to become one in Christ.

The Posture and Sign of Reverence for Receiving Communion



The new addition of the *General Instruction* asks the Conference of Bishops in each country to determine the posture to be used for the reception of Communion and the act of reverence to be made by each person as he or she receives Communion. **The Conference of Bishops of the United States has determined that in this country Communion will be received standing and that a bow will be the act of reverence made by those receiving communion.** This act of reverence is to be made in procession just before it is your turn to receive the Body of the Lord and just before it is your turn to receive the Precious Blood. The diocesan bishop may also determine the posture following the Lamb of God (*Agnus Dei*) when the priest shows the Body and Blood of the Lord to the people. After consulting the Liturgical Commission and hearing the input of many priests **Archbishop Brunett has determined that all should continue standing after the Lamb of God until the end of the Communion Procession unless prevented by age or infirmity.** This is in accord with the universal norms of the Church and will maintain the unity of the communion rite and the flow of communion. After the communion procession ends, when the priest sits, all sit or kneel for a significant period of religious silence to meditate on the great gift they have received in the Eucharist.

These norms may require some adjustment on the part of those who have been used to other practices; however, the significance of unity in posture and gesture as a symbol of our unity as members of the one body of Christ should be the governing factor in our own actions.

Conclusion

It seems appropriate to conclude this reflection on the reception of Communion with a quotation from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

In Baptism we have been called to form but one body. The Eucharist fulfills this call: The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for all partake of the one bread (1 Cor 10:16, 17)".

If you are the body and members of Christ, then it is your sacrament that you receive. To that which you are you respond "Amen" ("yes, it is true!") and by responding to it you assent to it. For you hear the words, "the Body of Christ" and respond "Amen." Be then a member of the Body of Christ that your Amen may be true. (St. Augustine) CCC n. 1396

