

**Part 1: A Review of the Practice of Reception of the Source and Summit of our Faith**

As faithful Catholics, we embrace the beauty of our liturgy and the grace we receive in the sacraments. In faith, we cherish the sacredness of the Eucharist and respect it in practice and posture each time we receive the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ at Holy Communion. To that end, the Church has given us guidelines when we come to the Table of the Lord properly prepared to receive Him in the most intimate way we can while here on earth.

Unfortunately, not everyone employs these practices and the incidents of irreverent behaviour and sacrilegious actions have been on the increase in our parish. These incidents have ranged from inappropriate response to the statement “Body of Christ” (the only response is “Amen”) to walking away with the consecrated Host in hand (without consuming it) and has, on occasion, resulted in finding the Eucharist in the pews, on the floor, and even in the parking lot. While most of these may be the result of simple ignorance of the practice of reception of Holy Communion as well as our practice and belief regarding the sacraments, *all of us* have the responsibility to protect the Eucharist from such unacceptable misbehaviour and profanity. There have been a few but increasing comments from Mass attendees about these issues, and the time has come to review these concerns and catechise, re-catechise, review, and implement some modifications to our procedures to ensure that the Eucharist is treated with the utmost reverence it deserves.

In this writing, Part I of 2, let us review our posture and response when we present ourselves for Holy Communion. This review is not meant to cast any aspersions on an individual or group, but to review what is given to us in the *General Instructions* and other documents promoted by the Church. By reflecting on why we do what we do, and implementing these practices, we can also help others learn from our actions and be role models living our faith to all who come to our church to worship our Lord.

Before receiving Holy Communion, we are to be free of mortal sin. Receiving the Eucharist in the state of mortal sin is what is known as a *sacrilege*, which is defined as the defamation of a sacred object and is, by its nature, also a mortal sin. Fortunately, mortal sin can be addressed and forgiven with a humble and contrite heart through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and a firm purpose of amendment not to sin again. Mortal sin does not, however, preclude a person from attending the Holy Mass; in fact, such a person would be encouraged to attend because our Lord is still present in Scripture, and listening to the Word may very well be a moment filled with grace. While actual reception of the Eucharist must be avoided in such cases, the person may enter the Communion line and present him or herself for a special prayer from the minister, deacon, or priest. The proper sign in this case is to cross arms over the heart (center of the chest) signifying a request for the prayer<sup>1</sup> instead of reception of the Eucharist.

When approaching the minister for Holy Communion, the communicant is asked to display a *sign of reverence* toward the Eucharist *if physically able to do so*.<sup>2</sup> This can be a simple bow of the head, a profound bow, or genuflection.

In the Diocese of Phoenix, when receiving the Host, several options are available: reception on the tongue or reception in the hand. Additionally, a kneeling<sup>3</sup> or standing posture may

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the word “prayer” is used here and not “blessing.” What is said over the person in this case is “Receive the Lord Jesus in your heart.” It is necessary to avoid the appearance of a “blessing” (no hands are extended over the person) so as to not infer any special blessing or privilege. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, #22.

<sup>2</sup> *General Instructions of the Roman Missal*, #136.

<sup>3</sup> In the Diocese of Phoenix, Bishop Dolan has directed that kneelers will not be used during the distribution of Holy Communion nor will Communion rails be used for the reception of the Eucharist for the Ordinary Form

be used; the choice of how to receive the Eucharist is that of the recipient, not of the minister offering the Eucharist.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, when the Ordinary Minister or Extraordinary Minister says, “Body of Christ” or “Blood of Christ,” the *only* proper response is “Amen.” No words should replace this statement of “Amen,” nor should words be added to “Amen” because this single word is a summation of not just what we believe to be true, but a statement that is all encompassing about who is present before us, Jesus Christ, and all that the Church teaches. Saying “Amen” is also a pledge, if you will, that the recipient will follow Christ. Furthermore, this simple word, *Amen*, translates to “so be it.”<sup>5</sup> Saying “I believe” or “Thank you” simply doesn’t encompass the fullest meaning of “Amen” when presented with the most intimate moment we have with Our Lord while here on earth.

With this knowledge and practice, it is hoped that we can present ourselves at Holy Communion in a reverent manner befitting the incredible gift that we have been given: the Body and Blood our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eucharist.

(Part 2 of 2, “New Procedures for the Reception of the Eucharist at Mass” will appear in next week’s bulletin.)

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(*Novus Ordo*) of the Mass. Using kneelers or the Communion rail is reserved only for the Extraordinary Form (Tridentine Mass/Latin Mass). As such, a person may kneel on the floor or stand for the reception of the Eucharist for the Ordinary Form of the Mass.

<sup>4</sup> Code of Canon Law, Canon 843 §1, cf. Canon 915.

<sup>5</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1396, 2856.