

## **Part 2: New Procedures for the Reception of the Eucharist at Mass**

In Part 1, we reviewed the practice and reception of Holy Communion guidelines in word and posture. In this writing, we will discuss some new procedures that will be implemented at St. Thomas Aquinas on 2 December, but first a brief review of the theology behind these changes is in order.

In their 22<sup>nd</sup> session held on September 17, 1562, the Fathers of the Council of Trent provided the Church with this statement: “Holy things must be treated in a holy way, and this sacrifice [the Eucharist] is the most holy of all things.”<sup>1</sup> From this simple yet profound statement, we can understand why the Church teaches and practices (and asks us to do the same) an unceasing focus on reverence toward the Eucharist. The Council goes on to state:

And so, that this sacrifice might be worthily and reverently offered and received, the Catholic Church many centuries ago instituted the sacred canon.<sup>2</sup> It is so free from all error that it contains nothing that does not savour strongly of holiness and piety and nothing that does not raise to God the minds of those who offer [it]. For it is made up of the words of our Lord himself, of apostolic traditions, and of devout instructions of holy pontiffs.<sup>3</sup>

In this short summation of the Church’s most essential liturgical formulae, the Fathers of Trent not only acknowledge the Roman Canon’s sanctity, but also the sacred sources upon which it was founded: our Lord himself, his Apostles, and his Apostles’ successors. In this description, we encounter the explanation in which the Church has always approached the stabilizing force of things liturgical: continuity and tradition. Even Pope Francis acknowledges this and has noted that the Roman Canon (*Canon Missae*) constitutes one of the Roman Rite’s “more distinctive elements” and, thus, demonstrates a line of continuity between the Mass in its current form and “earlier forms of the liturgy.”<sup>4</sup>

In the Roman Canon, after the Consecration, we encounter this beautiful stanza during which time the priest bows, joins his hands, and prays:

In humble prayer we ask you, almighty God, command that these gifts be borne by the hands of your holy Angel to your altar on high in the sight of your divine majesty so that all of us, who through this participation at the altar receive the most holy Body and Blood of your Son.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Denzinger, Henrich. *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, 43<sup>rd</sup> Edition. (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2012), p. 418.

<sup>2</sup> The canon that is mentioned in this quote is the prayer used at the Holy Mass known as Eucharistic Prayer I and is most often prayed by the priest when the Church gathers on significant Solemnities, such as Christmas and Easter, but this prayer can be used at any time the Mass is prayed. Perhaps it is most easily recognized by the mention of the Apostles as well as some saints who are not specifically mentioned in the other Eucharistic Prayers (II, III, IV, etc.).

<sup>3</sup> Denzinger, Henrich, pp 418-419.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, *Epistula* accompanying the motu proprio *Traditionis custodes* (16 July 2021, English translation). [www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2021/documents/202101716.lettera-vescovi-liturgia.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2021/documents/202101716.lettera-vescovi-liturgia.html). Accessed 4 September 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer I.

In this solemn moment of prayer, we note the words “through this *participation at the altar*” in which we are able to receive the Eucharist, “the most holy of all things,” in a most reverent participation where the Sacrifice of the Mass has taken place – the altar itself. In these words, we the people of God, are invited forward to His altar where the gift of Jesus himself is gifted to those who are properly disposed to receive the Eucharist. How amazing is it that you and I are *called forward* for the most intimate moment that we can have this side of heaven to receive the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Given this invitation to participation, at St. Thomas Aquinas we will adopt a slightly altered distribution method of the Eucharist during all Masses. Instead of distribution half-way down the centre aisle, all persons are invited to come forward to the sanctuary where the Sacrifice has occurred on the altar and receive Holy Communion from an Ordinary or Extraordinary Minister. This practice is already in place for the daily Mass and has been used on occasion during the Sunday Mass under certain circumstances. Where practiced in other parishes, it has not lengthened the time of distribution because the same number of Ordinary and Extraordinary Ministers are present – just now located at the base of the sanctuary.

To accomplish this change, and so that the distribution can occur without lengthening the time needed to do so, please adopt the following practices when receiving Holy Communion:

1. The procession line follows a familiar pattern to that of today: the front row of pews in the main body and east and west seating areas begin the reception as prompted by the ushers. After receiving the Eucharist, proceed back to the seating area via the side aisle (as is current practice).
2. Persons in the rows may remain kneeling (or sitting due to infirmity or necessity) until prompted by the usher to enter the procession toward the sanctuary. Persons who are not able to proceed to the sanctuary will need to identify themselves to the ushers so that the Eucharist may be brought to them after general distribution is complete.<sup>6</sup>
3. When approaching the sanctuary, all Ordinary and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion will be lined up at the base of the sanctuary. Please proceed to the *next available* Minister or Extraordinary Minister so as to not unnecessarily delay others in line.
4. The Precious Blood will be available at certain Masses; ministers who distribute the Precious Blood will be located at the front corners of the sanctuary. For those who choose not to receive the Precious Blood, a sign of reverence (such as a head bow) toward the Blood of Christ is still called for as the person walks by the chalice.
5. For persons who need to receive a low-gluten host, you may proceed in line with your row; however, the only point of distribution for a low gluten Host will be from the deacon or priest. Arrangements should be made prior to Mass to ensure that the low gluten host is available at Mass, and at that time it will be communicated to the recipient who will have the Host during distribution.

There are also some practical reasons for adopting these changes (as well as theological reasons) not the least of which is to help maintain the sacred nature and security of the Eucharist and to prevent profanity of a sacred object, whether intentional or unintentional (see Part 1 previously published for more information). It is the responsibility of *all of us*, not just the ministers of Holy Communion, to make sure that the Host is consumed prior to leaving the sanctuary area. If noticed that the Body of Christ has not been consumed, the observer is to *politely* ask the person to consume the Host or to return it; if a lay person gets the Eucharist under these circumstances, s/he may consume the Eucharist right then and there, or immediately return it to an Ordinary or Extraordinary minister for consumption or proper disposal.

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<sup>6</sup> Persons sitting at or near the front row of each section may receive the Eucharist prior to the regular distribution of Holy Communion if known to the Ordinary or Extraordinary Minister prior to distribution. If the person is missed at the beginning, please contact an usher prior to the conclusion of Holy Communion. Anyone who uses an assistive device is welcome to join the general line if physically able to do so or with the aid of an assistant.

As we get more familiar with this new procedure for distribution and reception of the Eucharist, the amount of time for its distribution will decrease and it will become just as familiar as the current method, but all of us will be able to come to the table of the Lord and more fully participate in the Sacrifice of the Mass.

By adopting this way of receiving the Eucharist at Holy Communion, all who come to our parish will have the opportunity to participate at the altar and receive the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we can more reverently and securely engage in this most sacred and ancient Rite.

Blessings and peace.  
Fr. Bryan