

Receiving the Eucharist, Opening Ourselves to Change

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When Catholics receive Holy Communion, they participate in an intimate sharing in the life of God. As Pope Francis said in an audience, “Although we are the ones who stand in procession to receive Communion . . . , in reality it is Christ who comes toward us to assimilate us in him. There is an encounter with Jesus!”

The entire liturgy prepares the assembly for this moment. Hearing the Word of God stimulates the desire of believers to draw closer to God. Praying the Eucharistic Prayer rouses hearts to offer God thanks and praise for the death that brings life. The Lord’s Prayer proclaims a hunger for the bread that nourishes. The Sign of Peace strengthens the bond of unity before the community approaches the table of reconciliation.

One of the ways this unity is expressed is in song. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* mandates that the Communion Song begin while the priest is receiving Communion and continue until the last person receives. The song helps believers to see that Communion is a corporate act of thanksgiving, as the US Bishops expressed in their 2006 statement “Happy Are Those Who Are Called to His Supper.”

The reception of Holy Communion is an act of the Church as the Body of Christ. While we each personally receive Holy Communion, it is not a private devotion. Rather, the reception of Holy Communion is an integral part of our worship as a community of faith.

The community’s procession is a sign of the pilgrim Church on earth moving toward the heavenly Jerusalem. The assembly moves in solidarity not only with one another but with the countless number of all the baptized, those living and those who have gone before.

Such a procession requires an awareness of the gift about to be received. The people move as one body who know they have been loved and redeemed by God. They approach the table of the Lord with humility, gratitude, and eager anticipation.

Before receiving the Body and the Blood of Christ, communicants make a bow of the head in reverence to Christ. The minister says, “The Body of Christ” and “The Blood of Christ.” The Body of Christ is received in the palm of the hand or on the tongue, a decision that is made by the communicant, not by the person distributing. The cup is received into the hands of the communicant, who drinks from it.

After the minister presents the host and the cup, the “Amen” that is uttered affirms the belief in the Body of Christ.



The Communion procession moves as one body, aware that they are loved and have been redeemed.

It also affirms a commitment, a yes to God’s invitation to share in God’s very life. As St. Augustine said:

If you are the body and the members of Christ, then your mystery lies on the table of the Lord. You receive your own mystery, and your response to what you are is “Amen.” Then be a member of the body of Christ so that your Amen be true! Be what you see there! Receive what you are!

Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, as Pope Francis said in the audience, calls us to conversion:

To nourish oneself of the Eucharist means to allow oneself to be changed by what we receive. . . . Each time we receive Communion, we resemble Jesus more; we transform ourselves more fully into Jesus. As the Bread and the Wine are converted into the Body and Blood of the Lord, so too those who receive it with faith are transformed into a living Eucharist.

Once the community has participated in the feast, all may spend some time in silence or in a song of praise and thanksgiving. Then the community is sent from the church to be the Body of Christ, “a living Eucharist” in the world.