

## The Mass and the reception of Holy Communion

The Liturgy Group in the Parish has been discussing ways in which we as a Parish Community and a Eucharistic People can enhance our celebration of the Mass. The group has reflected upon the fact that ever since the Irish people first heard the Good News, through the Penal times and up to the present day, receiving the Body of Christ at Mass has been at the very heart of who we are as a Christian people. In today's high speed, instant access world we can sometimes feel that the pace of life is becoming ever faster and that spiritual matters are becoming less and less important. The Liturgy Group wants to try to help us continue celebrating our Catholic faith in a way that is joyful and supportive, enriching our individual and community lives. The group has recently looked at our practice of receiving Holy Communion and we would like to provide some information on this central expression of our faith. We invite you to take some quiet time to reflect on the information.

At the close of the 49th International Eucharistic Congress in Quebec, Canada, Pope Benedict XVI shared these thoughts on the Eucharist to those present and also to young people who had gathered for the Congress.

“The Eucharist is our most beautiful treasure. It is the Sacrament par excellence; it ushers us into eternal life in advance; it contains the entire mystery of salvation; it is the source and summit of the action and life of the Church as the Second Vatican Council recalled. It is therefore particularly important that pastors and faithful be constantly committed to deepening their knowledge of this great Sacrament. In this way each one will be able to affirm his/her faith and carry out her/his mission in the Church, and in the world ever better, remembering that the Eucharist bears fruit in one's personal life, in the life of the Church and the world.

“The ‘Mystery of Faith’: this we proclaim at every Mass. I would like everyone to make a commitment to study this great mystery, especially by revisiting and exploring, individually and in groups, the Council's text on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, so as to bear witness courageously to the mystery. In this way, each person will arrive at a better grasp of the meaning of every aspect of the Eucharist, understanding its depth and living it with greater intensity. Each sentence, every gesture has its own meaning and conceals a mystery. I sincerely hope that this reflection will serve as an appeal to all the faithful to make a similar commitment to a renewal of Eucharistic catechesis, so that they themselves will gain a genuine Eucharistic awareness and will in turn teach children and young people to recognise the central mystery of faith and build their lives around it.

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I urge priests especially to give due honour to the Eucharistic rite, and I ask all the faithful to respect the role of each individual, both priest and lay, in the Eucharistic action. The liturgy does not belong to us: it is the Church's treasure. Reception of the Eucharist, adoration of the Blessed sacrament “by this we mean deepening our Communion, preparing for it and prolonging it” is also about allowing ourselves to enter into communion with Christ, and through Him with the whole of the Trinity, so as to become what we receive and to live in communion with the Church.

It is by receiving the Body of Christ that we receive the strength of unity with God and with one another. May all of you become ever more deeply aware of the importance of the Sunday Eucharist, because Sunday, the first day of the week, is the day when we honour Christ, the day when we receive the strength to live each day the gift of God. I would also like to invite pastors and the faithful to take a renewed interest in their preparation for receiving the Eucharist. Despite our weakness and sin, Christ wants to make His dwelling place in us. This is why we must do everything in our power to receive Him with a pure heart, continuously rediscovering through the Sacrament of forgiveness that purity which sin has stained, that our minds be attuned to our voices. Sin in fact, especially serious sin, impedes the action of the Eucharistic grace within us.

“The Eucharist is not a meal with friends. It is the mystery of a covenant. The prayers and rites of the Eucharistic sacrifice revive the whole history of salvation continuously before the eyes of our soul, in the course of the liturgical cycle and make us enter its significance ever more deeply. We are called to enter into this mystery of a covenant by conforming our lives ever more closely each day to the gift received in the Eucharist. It has a sacred character, as the Second Vatican Council recalls: “every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the Priest and of His Body, which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree. In a certain way, it is a heavenly liturgy, an anticipation of the banquet in the eternal Kingdom, announcing the death and Resurrection of Christ until He comes. After receiving the Word of God, after having been nourished by His Body, let yourselves be inwardly transformed and receive your mission from Him. Indeed, He sends you into the world to be messengers of His peace and witnesses of His message of love.

“Do not forget that the Sunday Eucharist is a loving encounter with the Lord that we can not do without. When you recognise Him at the Breaking of Bread, like the disciples at Emmaus, you will become His companions. He will help you to grow and to give the best of yourselves. Remember that in the Bread of the Eucharist, Christ is really, totally and substantially present. It is therefore in the mystery of the Eucharist, at Mass and during the silent adoration before the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, that you will meet Him in a privileged way.

By opening your very being and your whole life under the gaze of Christ, you will not be crushed “quite the contrary: you will discover that you are infinitely loved. You will receive the power that you need in order to build your lives and to make

choices that present themselves to you every day.â€•

The Holy Fatherâ€™s words of respect and reverence for the Mass and our celebration of it have been echoed in the discussions at the Liturgy Group and also in the remarks made by Cardinal Brady in the Diocese concerning Confirmation Ceremonies. This latter comment has been repeated in our own Parish and there has been a marked increase in the level of quietness, silence and respect during Mass.

The celebration of Mass is the action of Christ and the people of God assembled.Â The Church is both universal and local and for each Catholic, no matter where they are, no matter who they are, the Mass is the centre of our whole Christian life.Â It is only right then that we should want to celebrate Mass with the greatest joy and respect, taking our proper part in this heavenly meal in as conscious, active and full a manner as possible.Â Mass is the high point of our lives as Catholics and as such reception of Holy Communion should be done in a manner that highlights this fact.

From the earliest centuries of the Church, believers gathered to fulfil Christâ€™s command to â€˜Do this in memory of me.â€™ Speaking to new converts to the faith, in a sermon on Easter Sunday 348AD, St. Cyril of Jerusalem spoke on the proper procedure for receiving Holy Communion: When you approach Holy Communion make your hand into a throne, which receives the King. With your hand hallowed receive the Body of Christ and answer â€˜Amenâ€™. He also speaks about receiving from the chalice: After partaking of Christâ€™s Body, go to receive the Chalice of His Blood, bow your head and say â€˜Amenâ€™ to show your homage and reverence.

#### Receiving Holy Communion

The Parish Liturgy Group has looked at how we receive Holy Communion at Mass.Â After reflection and discussion it was agreed that approaching the Altar to receive Holy Communion would better enable us to give due respect and reverence to the Sacrament, emphasising the fact that we are one people gathered around the Table of the Lord.Â In addition it was proposed that in future we would approach the Priest / Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion who will remain standing at a fixed point rather than walking along the sanctuary with the Ciborium / Communion Bowl.

Beginning on the first weekend of August 2008 this will be the way Holy Communion will be distributed in both Churches of the Parish on Sundays and weekdays.

Whether you wish to receive Holy Communion in the hand or on the tongue please do so reverently and have consideration for others who are receiving also, allowing them to approach the Priest / Extraordinary Minister in turn.

If it is not your custom to receive Holy Communion but you would like to join the Communion procession please feel free to come to the Altar.Â You should stand in front of the Priest with your arms crossed over your chest and you will receive a blessing.

#### Receiving Holy Communion in the hand

â€•Â When approaching the Priest / Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, place your right or left hand under the other hand, making a hollow or throne for the Eucharist.

â€•Â When the Priest / Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion says, â€˜The Body of Christâ€™, answer â€˜Amenâ€™

â€•Â Step to the left or right of the Priest / Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion.

â€•Â Take the Eucharist from the hollow of your hand with your other hand and place it in your mouth immediately.

#### Receiving Holy Communion on the tongue

Please make sure that your mouth is open sufficiently to receive the Body of Christ.

#### Links

[Homily of Pope Benedict XVI at the closing Mass of the 49th International Eucharistic Congress](#)

[Sacrosanctum Concilium \(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy\)](#)

[Guidelines for the Reception of Holy Communion](#)