

Understanding the Mass

Part 22 in a series

The Rite of Communion, continued

The priest and deacon along with the Extraordinary Ministers are now moving down front to bring communion to the congregation.

Extraordinary Ministers

Just who are these Extraordinary Ministers? The term “Extraordinary” in this case does not mean “highly exceptional” or “remarkable”, though I’m sure that these folks are truly wonderful people! The laypeople who assist with distribution are considered “Extra-ordinary” or, in addition to the “Ordinary.” So, just who are the “Ordinary?” The General Instruction of the Roman Missal puts it this way, “By virtue of his sacred ordination, the bishop or priest offers the sacrifice in the person of Christ, the Head of the Church. He receives gifts of bread and wine from the faithful, offers the sacrifice to God, and returns to them the very Body and Blood of Christ, as from the hands of Christ himself. Thus bishops and priests are considered the *ordinary ministers of Holy Communion*. In addition the Deacon who assists the bishop or priest in distributing Communion is an ordinary minister of Holy Communion.” If there are not enough bishops, priests or deacons present to serve Holy Communion in a timely manner, they may be assisted by extraordinary ministers. These ministers have received spiritual, theological and practical preparation to fulfill their role with knowledge and reverence.

Communion

Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.” John 6:53-58

Are you ready to receive communion? Remember at the very beginning of this series when I spoke of coming to Mass early and spending time in prayer? One of the things you should do during this time is truly examine your conscience to be sure you are prepared to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. The Church teaches that we must be in a state of “grace” to receive the Eucharist. This means that we are not conscious of having any unconfessed grave or mortal sin. If we are not in a state of grace then we should first go to confession prior to coming forward for communion. We should also respect the one hour fast from food and drink (with the exception of water and necessary medicines) prior to receiving Communion. There is an exception to this rule for those who are elderly or infirm. If you wish to receive a blessing instead, then present yourself with your arms crossed over your chest.

You should bow before the Eucharist before receiving. This is a show of respect and reverence. Do not try to grab the Eucharist from the hand of the minister as this would be disrespectful; always allow the minister to place the host in your palm or on your tongue. Always reply to the minister “Amen” when he presents the “Body of Christ” or the “Blood of Christ”.

After receiving Communion we should return to our seats and kneel for a period of silent prayer. “...we are stuck with awe at the entire mystery of our faith concentrated into what has just happened; namely, that the eternal Son should become incarnate and share himself with us in this most intimate of ways. In this silence, of course, we reflect on what has been accomplished, conversing in our hearts in a profoundly personal way with Christ.” Fr. Jeremy Driscoll, “What Happens at Mass”