



November 22, 2009

Dear Parishioners:

For a few hundred years leading up to Vatican Council II, Catholics tended more and more to think of communion as a very private affair between “Jesus and me.” Many may remember going to the altar rail and kneeling to receive communion. Many were surprised to learn that this was neither liturgically nor theologically accurate, and the Council called for a return to our roots, where communion was an intensely communal experience where the Body of Christ in the Sacrament of Holy Communion met the people, who are the Body of Christ.

In the early Church, the communion procession itself was a very significant part of receiving communion. It was not a time then, nor is it now, when people just lined up to get communion or knelt down at an altar rail. As the faith community processed together, all were reminded that Communion binds us intimately to the entire Body of Christ, which includes all the baptized who have gone before us as believers.¹

Today, the Church calls us to understand that the “...Communion procession is an action of the Body of Christ. It is a time when we as members of the community move forward to share in the sacred meal ... which is the sign and source of our unity”.² The procession to the altar is meant to symbolize our common journey together to God’s heavenly banquet.

Moreover, this action by Christ’s Body – the Church assembled for the Eucharist – is manifested and supported by the Communion Hymn, a hymn of praise of Christ sung by the united voices of those who believe in Him and share His life. The US Catholic Bishops explain in their document *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*: “While the priest is receiving the Sacrament, the Communion chant (song) is begun...its function is to express outwardly the communicant’s union in spirit by means of the unity of their voices...and continues for as long as the Sacrament is beginning administered...The singing of the people should be preeminent.”

I have observed over time that the idea of the smooth, continuous flow of the procession is not happening as envisioned nor is it always possible. As a result, the Liturgy Committee has proposed that we adjust the order of moving from our places into the aisle to form the procession.

To permit an even, continuous procession, I have approved the committee’s recommendation that we flow into the Communion procession from the front of church moving toward the back of church, two rows at a time. Thus, the front rows on either side of the church will begin to form

¹ USCCB, *The Reception of Holy Communion at Mass*, www.usccb.org/liturgy/girm/bul5.shtml.

² Ibid.

the communion procession next to the pews. The second row on each side of the church will form in the center of the aisle. This order of alternating pews flowing from front to back should be followed until all have received communion. After returning to our places the instructions call for the entire assembly to remain standing until all have received, as a further sign of our solidarity.

To facilitate a unity of voices during the Communion Hymn – as the Bishops envisioned – our Music Director will select hymns for Communion that are both appropriate to the season and easy to sing without a book. We will begin with a simple refrain that will be repeated as the choir sings the verses:

*“Presence of God in Body and Blood,
Guide us to love. Guide us to serve.
Let us be one with you.”*

I ask you to understand that the purpose of these changes in how our Communion procession forms and flows are to help deepen our sense of journey and communion so essential to Eucharistic banquet.

Vatican II called us to return to the more ancient and authentic way of receiving communion.³ We don’t “take” communion, we *receive* communion. It is a gift. As the procession approaches the altar, we are invited to bow slightly out of reverence, look into the eyes of the minister who says, “The Body of Christ” to which we respond, “Amen” and then receive Holy Communion in our hands. In that “Amen,” we commit to living as the Body of Christ. The instruction is then to step aside, pause and place the Eucharistic Bread into one’s mouth, before proceeding on to drink from the Cup.⁴ (As soon as the serious flu threat has passed, we will begin to offer Communion from the Cup again.)

We live in a sadly, divided, torn world. All these signs of oneness, especially at the time we receive communion, are meant to instill in us the courage to live that oneness once we depart and go our separate ways.

We will begin to implement these changes to our communion procession at Masses during Advent. Later, if we need to make further adjustments, we will consider them.

Sincerely in Christ,



Rev. Msgr. James C. Kidder
Pastor

³ Chapter II, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II, Pauline Books and Media, Boston, MA, 1999.

⁴ Ibid, USCCB, *The Reception of Holy Communion at Mass*.