

The Reception of Holy Communion by the Catholic Faithful

On Easter 2002, Pope John Paul II was presented with the third edition of the *Roman Missal*, the book that contains the prayers and instructions on how Catholics celebrate the Mass. Each edition of the *Roman Missal* has an introduction, an instruction book on the *Missal* – this is called the “General Instruction on the Roman Missal” (or GIRM). The previous edition of the GIRM was from 1975 and had been used for nearly three decades. In March of 2003, a new English translation of the GIRM was approved by the Vatican. This revision is not something new; rather it builds upon the 1975 edition. Included within the revised GIRM are recent decisions made by the United States bishops regarding the reception of Holy Communion by the Catholic faithful.

How does one receive Communion?

In 1969, Pope Paul VI gave permission to receive Communion in the hand. The reception of Communion in the hand is a return to a traditional practice of the Church. Quoting from St. Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 348), Pope Paul VI instructed that, “‘When you approach Holy Communion, make the left hand into a throne for the right, which will receive the King.’ Then with your lower hand, take the consecrated Host and place it in your mouth.” The option to receive Communion in the hand or on the tongue is left to the individual receiving it. Whether in the hand or on the tongue, it should be done with respect toward the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

What does one say when receiving Communion?

When the communicant is presented with the Body (the bread) or the Blood (the cup) of Christ by the minister, their response is simply “**Amen.**” This Hebrew word is an affirmation of faith in which the communicant is saying, “I believe.”

What is the proper posture for receiving Communion?

The norm for the reception of Holy Communion in the dioceses of the United States is **standing**.

What is the proper gesture of reverence before receiving Communion?

The proper gesture when receiving Holy Communion in the dioceses of the United States is a **bow of the head**. The Communion minister presents the consecrated bread or wine, the communicant bows their head before the specific element, responds “Amen,” and receives Communion.

What about intinction?

Intinction is a form of Communion where the Communion minister dips the consecrated bread into the consecrated wine and then ministers it to the communicant. Intinction is not offered in the Diocese of St. Petersburg because it means the bread and cup ministers must be next to one another, a paten must be used, and it does not allow the communicant to receive in the hand. The practice of the communicant taking the host and dipping it into the cup themselves is not permitted by the Church.

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