

The Liturgy of the Eucharist Part Two and the Concluding Rites
04/02/17

As we approach the end of our journey through the Mass, I want to be sure to address two specific items: reception of communion and the recessional hymn. But before I do that, there are a couple other items to get to.

In my column this weekend, I address the Lord's Prayer, the Sign of Peace, and some of the silent prayers the priest says before the communion procession begins. He places a small particle of host in the main chalice and then, before presenting the Body and Blood to the congregation, he genuflects and says a silent prayer, basically praying that receiving the Body and Blood be protection in mind and body. It is a very humbling moment for me and, I'm sure, my brother priests.

Before the communion procession begins, the priest presents the consecrated bread to the whole assembly, saying "Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb." Jean-Yves Garneau reminds us that, when we hear those words, we should consider ourselves blessed to be believers, to be there at Mass, and to be getting ready to receive the Body of Christ. And then we repeat the words of the centurion who had asked that his servant be healed.

We proclaim our unworthiness to receive the Body of Christ, just as the Centurion said he was not worthy to have Jesus enter his house. Garneau suggests that no one among us – absolutely no one – is worthy to receive Jesus. Only Jesus, by His word which purifies and sanctifies us, can make us worthy to receive Him.

Now the communion procession begins and we come to an all-important question: should I receive the host in the hand or on the tongue? In times past, it was the rule to only receive on the tongue. Regardless of whether you receive on the tongue or in the hand, there should be a slight bow before receiving, to show reverence for the sacred host.

For some who receive on the tongue, it is perhaps because they find it more fitting and reverent; for some it is because they grew up with the custom; and for some it may be because they are afraid of accidentally

mishandling the Sacrament. However, if you do wish to receive on the tongue, please be certain to extend your tongue far enough for the minister to place the host on it. And please do not take the host and bite down on it; if your tongue is extended far enough, that will be unnecessary. Plus, I see it as a major sign of disrespect.

If you receive in the hand, first of all, be sure your hands are clean. This may seem obvious but if someone has just come from work and the work involves messiness of any kind, it is another sign of respect to wash your hands. Place one hand under the other as the minister says, "The Body of Christ." The minister will then place the host in your hand. Whatever you do, don't reach out and take it. And please be sure your hands are low enough for the minister to have a chance to place the host on your hand.

And this brings us to the end of Mass. There will usually be announcements, though we do our best to keep them to a minimum. Then comes the blessing, which may include a formal blessing, and the sending forth. Then typically the Recessional song or hymn begins.

It used to be that one could arrive at Mass around the time of the homily and leave as soon as communion was received. The Church, and your pastor, now hope and even expect that people will stay until the song is concluded and the ministers have left the body of the church. As I said when I spoke about trying to arrive on time, I realize there will be times when there is a need to leave in order to make a commitment. But some leave early week after week, no matter how long Mass has run, whether it has been 45 or 75 minutes.

Mass is over and so, now what? Mike Aquilina suggests we take the power of the Mass into the world. We have just been given a marvelous gift; we have become one body with Christ and with all the other people of God. Aquilina says we are to remember we have a part in God's plan. The Mass unites us so we can all work together. It doesn't mean each of us has to do everything; rather, it means each of should be doing what God calls us to do.