

A Step-by-Step Guide for Receiving Holy Communion at Mass

According to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), Canon Law, and the Teaching of the Catholic Church

Dear Faithful,

Holy Communion is the most sacred moment of our participation in the Holy Mass. In the Eucharist, we receive not merely a symbol, but Jesus Christ Himself—Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. The Church therefore calls every Catholic to approach the Blessed Sacrament with reverence, faith, humility, and proper disposition.

The following guide is offered to help the faithful prepare for and receive Holy Communion according to the norms and teachings of the Catholic Church.

1. Prepare Your Soul Before Mass

Before approaching Holy Communion, the Church teaches that a person must:

- Be a baptized Catholic in full communion with the Church.
- Believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.
- Be in a state of grace (free from unconfessed mortal sin).
- Observe the Eucharistic fast of one hour before receiving Communion (water and medicine excepted).

Canon Law Teaches:

“A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to celebrate Mass or receive the body of the Lord without previous sacramental confession.”

— Canon 916

Sacred Scripture Warns:

“Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord.”

— 1 Corinthians 11:27

Proper preparation for Holy Communion begins long before entering the Communion procession.

2. Participate Reverently in the Mass

The Eucharist is not an isolated moment but the summit of the entire Sacred Liturgy.

The faithful are encouraged to:

- Join prayerfully in the responses and hymns.
- Listen attentively to the Word of God.
- Unite their hearts to Christ's sacrifice upon the altar.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal reminds us that the faithful should participate "fully, consciously, and actively" in the liturgy.

3. Approach the Communion Procession Reverently

When it is time for Holy Communion:

- Leave your pew calmly and prayerfully.
- Process with reverence and without haste.
- Maintain a spirit of recollection rather than conversation.

The Communion procession is itself a sacred act—a visible sign of the pilgrim People of God approaching the heavenly banquet.

4. Make an Act of Reverence Before Receiving

In the dioceses of the United States, the prescribed sign of reverence before receiving Holy Communion is a bow of the head.

The GIRM States:

"When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the Sacrament as a gesture of reverence."

Some faithful may kneel where permitted or physically possible, and they may not be denied Holy Communion for doing so.

This act of reverence should be intentional and prayerful, recognizing that one is approaching Christ Himself.

5. Respond “Amen”

As the minister presents the Sacred Host and says:

“The Body of Christ,”

the communicant responds clearly and reverently:

“Amen.”

This “Amen” is a profession of faith:

- That this truly is Jesus Christ.
- That we believe what the Church teaches about the Eucharist.
- That we desire union with Him.

St. Augustine Teaches:

“When you hear ‘The Body of Christ,’ you reply ‘Amen.’ Be a member of Christ’s Body, then, so that your ‘Amen’ may be true.”

6. Receive Holy Communion

The Church permits two legitimate ways of receiving Holy Communion in the Latin Rite.

Receiving on the Tongue

- Open your mouth reverently.
- Extend your tongue sufficiently so the minister can place the Host safely.

Receiving in the Hand

According to the ancient custom restored by permission:

- Place one hand over the other, forming a “throne” for the Lord.
- Receive the Host carefully.
- Step aside slightly if needed.
- Consume the Host immediately in the presence of the minister before walking away.

Care should always be taken to avoid the loss of any fragments of the Sacred Host.

7. If Receiving from the Chalice

Where the Precious Blood is offered:

- The minister says, “**The Blood of Christ.**”
- Respond, “**Amen.**”
- Take a small, reverent sip from the chalice.
- Return it carefully to the minister.

The Church teaches that Christ is fully present under either species. Receiving only the Sacred Host is therefore receiving the whole Christ.

8. Return to Your Place in Prayer

After receiving Holy Communion:

- Return prayerfully to your pew.
- Kneel or sit according to local custom.
- Spend time in silent thanksgiving.

This is a privileged moment of intimate union with Christ.

Many saints encouraged making a prayer of thanksgiving after Communion because Our Lord is sacramentally present within us in a profound way.

St. Teresa of Ávila Writes:

“After having received the Lord, since you have the Person Himself present, strive to close the eyes of the body and open those of the soul.”

9. Remain Until the End of Mass

The Mass is not concluded after receiving Communion.

The faithful should remain through:

- The Prayer after Communion.
- The Final Blessing.
- The Dismissal.

The dismissal sends us forth to live what we have received:

- To become witnesses of Christ in the world.
 - To carry His love into daily life.
-

A Final Pastoral Reminder

The Church allows certain legitimate differences in devotional practice:

- Receiving on the tongue or in the hand.
- Standing or kneeling.
- Receiving under one species or both.

These options should never become causes for judgment or division among Catholics.

What matters most is:

- Faith in the Real Presence.
- Reverence for the Blessed Sacrament.
- Purity of heart.
- Love for Christ and His Church.

May every Holy Communion deepen our union with the Lord and transform us more fully into His disciples.