



# Saint Joseph Catholic Church

LLC Series 230

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## Pastoral Letter to the Faithful of St. Joseph Church and St. Florence Catholic Church

**Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,**

Grace and peace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ!

Over recent years, many faithful Catholics have expressed questions regarding certain liturgical practices at Holy Mass, especially concerning the reception of Holy Communion, postures during the Sacred Liturgy, and devotional customs such as the wearing of veils. Because these matters can sometimes become sources of misunderstanding or even division, I wish to offer this pastoral reflection to encourage greater unity, charity, and reverence within our parish communities.

### **Holy Communion: In the Hand or on the Tongue**

The Catholic Church currently permits the faithful to receive Holy Communion either on the tongue or in the hand. Both are legitimate practices within the Roman Rite.

From the earliest centuries of Christianity, many believers received Holy Communion in the hand. St. Cyril of Jerusalem instructed the newly baptized:

“Make your left hand a throne for your right, as for that which is to receive a King.”

— *Mystagogical Catecheses*, V.21

Over time, the practice of receiving on the tongue became widespread in the Western Church as a way of emphasizing reverence for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist and safeguarding the sacred species.

Today, the Church allows both practices. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states:

“The consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant.”

The Church does not teach that one approved method is holier or more pleasing to God than the other. What matters most is the reverence, faith, and devotion with which we approach the altar of the Lord.

The Holy Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life,” as taught by the Second Vatican Council (*Lumen Gentium*, 11). Our focus at every Mass must always remain Jesus Christ, truly present in the Most Holy Sacrament.

No parishioner should feel judged for receiving reverently in the hand, nor should anyone be criticized for choosing to receive on the tongue.

### **Standing or Kneeling for Holy Communion**

In the dioceses of the United States, the normative posture for receiving Holy Communion is standing. However, the Church also explicitly protects the right of the faithful to kneel if they so choose.

Both postures have deep roots in Catholic tradition:

- **Standing** was the customary posture of the early Church and symbolized the joy of Christ’s Resurrection.
- **Kneeling** developed later in the Western Church as a profound expression of adoration and humility before Christ truly present in the Eucharist.

Neither posture should become a cause for division among the faithful. The Church permits both because authentic reverence can be expressed in different legitimate ways.

### **Kneeling During the Consecration**

The Church in the United States directs the faithful to **kneel** during the Eucharistic Prayer, from after the *Sanctus* (“Holy, Holy, Holy”) until the Great Amen, except for those unable to kneel because of health, age, or other reasonable circumstances.

Kneeling at this sacred moment expresses our adoration before the mystery of Christ’s Body and Blood made present upon the altar.

At the same time, we remember that standing during prayer was also an ancient Christian practice, especially on Sundays. The Church’s liturgical disciplines have developed over time while always preserving the same Eucharistic faith.

## The Wearing of Veils

Some women in our parishes choose to wear a chapel veil or mantilla during Mass as a personal act of reverence and devotion. This custom has ancient roots in Christian tradition and reflects the teaching of St. Paul:

“Every woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head” (1 Corinthians 11:5).

The Church has long understood the veil as a sign of humility, reverence, and the dignity of womanhood before God.

It is called a *veil* for a reason. Traditionally, a chapel veil is intended both to cover the head and to gently veil the eyes from the sacred mysteries before us, fostering humility, recollection, and reverence in the presence of Our Lord. For this reason, veils have historically been made of light, sheer material that allows one to see while still serving as a true veil.

The practice of veiling is not meant to be a fashion statement, nor is it fulfilled simply by placing any cloth, scarf, or decorative covering on the head. Rather, the veil carries a specific spiritual symbolism that should be respected and understood. External signs of worship are meant to help dispose us to deeper prayer, humility, and reverence before God.

The Church's liturgical tradition teaches that sacred signs should be fitting and expressive of their intended meaning. The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that “sacramental signs do not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it” (CCC 1123). Likewise, the Second Vatican Council taught that sacred rites and their signs should “express more clearly the holy things which they signify” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 21).

At the same time, the Church does not require women to wear veils under the current Code of Canon Law. Therefore:

- Women who wear veils should be respected.
- Women who do not wear veils should be equally respected.

No one should feel unwelcome, judged, or spiritually inferior because of personal devotional practices that the Church leaves to individual conscience and piety.

As a parish, we are pleased to provide chapel veils for those who wish to wear them. In keeping with longstanding custom, a limited number of white veils will be available for single women and black veils for married women. While this custom is not required by the Church, it remains a beautiful tradition that many Catholics continue to observe as a sign of devotion, modesty, and reverence before the Lord present in the Most Holy Eucharist.

## **A Call to Unity and Charity**

Dear friends, the Evil One delights when Catholics become divided over secondary matters. The Sacred Liturgy should never become a battleground between “traditional” and “modern” Catholics. The Church, in her wisdom, allows legitimate diversity in certain liturgical customs while preserving unity in doctrine and sacramental life.

St. Augustine’s well-known principle remains a guide for us:

**“In essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity.”**

Whether one receives Communion in the hand or on the tongue, stands or kneels, wears a veil or does not wear one, all are called to approach the Holy Eucharist with:

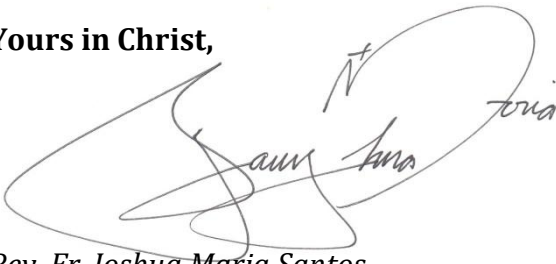
- Faith in the Real Presence
- Reverence for the Sacred Mysteries
- Humility before God
- Charity toward one another

Let us never allow external practices to overshadow the deeper call to holiness, conversion, and love.

May our parish communities always be places where reverence and charity walk together, where every soul is welcomed, and where Christ is truly at the center of all we do.

Entrusting all of you to the loving intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, I remain,

**Yours in Christ,**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joshua Maria Santos". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J" and "M".

*Rev. Fr. Joshua Maria Santos*

Pastor

St. Joseph Church & St. Florence Catholic Church