

RECEIVING THE BODY AND THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

In 2008, the *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments* (i.e., henceforth, “the Congregation”) issued norms related to the structure of the Mass and how it is to be celebrated in a document titled, *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (*GIRM*). The original text was in Latin and the various conferences of bishops throughout the world used that version to create a translation into the vernacular for their respective countries. An English translation of the text was produced by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, and it was granted a *recognitio* (a recognized approval) by the Congregation in 2010. Henceforth, that translation became the norm for the celebration of Mass in the dioceses of Canada. Because we will be restoring the administration of the Precious Blood at Sunday Mass in our parish, it is good for us to review the norms outlined in the *GIRM* (as well as statements from other Church documents) about the reception of the Body and the Blood of Christ.

A) Receiving the Body of Christ:

Redemptionis Sacramentum notes that one may receive the Body of Christ standing or kneeling; in addition, one may receive the Body of Christ in the hand or on the tongue (# 90-92).

The GIRM:

- ❖ When standing before the minister to receive Holy Communion, the faithful should **make a simple bow of the head** before receiving the Sacrament as a gesture of reverence. The minister raises the host slightly and shows it to each communicant, saying, “*The Body of Christ,*” and the communicant replies, “*Amen*”; the communicant then receives and consumes the Body of the Lord (# 160-161).
- ❖ When receiving in the hand, the communicant should be guided by the words of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, writing around 400 AD: “*...place your left hand as a throne beneath your right, as befits one who is about to receive the King. Then receive him, taking care that nothing is lost.*”

B) Administration of the Blood of Christ:

At various points in the *GIRM*, we find statements lauding the practice of the administration of both species (i.e., the Body and the Blood of Christ) in the Mass. For example:

80. Since the celebration of the Eucharist is the Paschal Banquet, it is desirable that in accordance with the Lord’s command his Body and Blood should be received as spiritual food by those of the faithful who are properly disposed.

281. Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it takes place under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clearer expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the connection between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Kingdom of the Father. (*Eucharisticum Mysterium*, May 25, 1967, no. 32)

No one is required to receive under both species because the *fullness* of Christ (the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Lord) is present in either of the Sacred Species (Catechism, # 1390). However, the Church encourages the reception of both the **Body** and the **Blood of Christ** as a “clearer expression” of the “Eucharistic banquet” and the “eternal Covenant ratified in the Blood of the Lord” (*GIRM* # 281).

C) Receiving the Blood of Christ:

The liturgical principle laid out in *GIRM* # 160 of making “***a simple bow of the head***” before receiving the Body of Christ would apply when receiving the Blood of Christ.

GIRM # 286 then states that the communicant “moves to the minister of the chalice and **stands** facing him. The minister says, ‘*The Blood of Christ*’, the communicant replies, “*Amen*”, and the minister hands over the chalice, which the communicant raises to his or her mouth. Each communicant drinks a little from the chalice, hands it back to the minister, and then withdraws; the minister wipes the rim of the chalice with the purificator.”

It is important here to reiterate the above instruction of the Church that the posture for receiving the Blood of Christ is one of standing. This is done to avoid situations of spillage from the chalice. It is much safer for the minister who is standing to give the chalice to a communicant who is also standing; it also allows for easier flow within the liturgy. ***Therefore, let us be faithful at IC Parish to the Church's instruction of receiving from the chalice while standing.***

D) A Few Final Thoughts:

- ❖ **The Practice of Intinction:** It should be noted that the only ministers who are to self-administer the chalice are bishops and priests. For this reason, it is not proper for a deacon or a lay person to receive the Body of Christ and to dip the Sacred Host into the Precious Blood (i.e., a practice called, “intinction”). This is based on the liturgical principle that the communicant is meant ***to receive*** the Precious Blood rather than to take it. It also safeguards against the possibility of drops of the Precious Blood falling onto the floor.
- ❖ **Children Receiving the Blood of Christ:** at the discretion of their parents/guardians, children who have received their First Holy Communion ***may*** receive the Blood of Christ at Sunday Mass. Parents with younger children (i.e., ages 7-8) are encouraged to practice the act of receiving from the chalice at home using a cup of similar size and weight.
- ❖ **Bowing when Passing By?:** If one receives the Body of Christ, but will not receive the Blood of Christ, should one make a bow of the head when passing by the Precious Blood? There are two theological perspectives on this: (1) one perspective suggests that one ***should*** make a bow of the head when passing by the Precious Blood as an act of faith and adoration in Christ really and fully present in the chalice; and (2) a second perspective suggests that one ***should not*** bow when passing by the Precious Blood because one is already carrying within oneself the fullness of Christ (his Body, Soul, Divinity, ***and Blood***) after receiving the Body of Christ. Because both perspectives have theological worth, this decision will be left to the discretion of each communicant.
- ❖ **Silence:** *GIRM* # 45, states: “**Even before the celebration itself** [i.e., Mass], **it is a praiseworthy practice for silence to be observed in the church...**” Therefore, let us afford each other a time for quiet prayer before Mass.
- ❖ **Genuflecting in Church:** *GIRM* # 274, states: “***A genuflection, made by bending the right knee to the ground, signifies adoration, and therefore it is reserved for the Most Blessed Sacrament...***” It is our traditional liturgical practice to make a genuflection on our right knee and to focus our eyes on the Tabernacle (in recognition of Christ being present there) before we enter our pew; and to do the same when we leave our pew at the end of Mass. If one cannot genuflect, one is asked to make a profound bow from the hip, or a bow of the head, toward Christ present in the tabernacle.