

COMMUNION RITE

Introduction

The Communion Rite is celebrated as the culmination of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. (Because of its complexity, it is being explained separately, here.) It begins with the Lord's Prayer and continues through the Prayer After Communion. While the actions surrounding the Communion Rite are not changing, some of the words change as we use the new English translation of the Roman Missal.

The Communion Rite begins with the Lord's Prayer.

Structure of the Communion Rite

The Lord's Prayer was introduced into the Mass by Pope Gregory dating back to the sixth century. In the Eucharistic Liturgy, the Lord's Prayer is the prayer of the whole Church and is situated in a special place to reveal its full meaning and efficacy. It is placed between the just completed Eucharistic Prayer and reception of Communion. Thus, the Lord's Prayer sums up, on the one hand, all the petitions and intercessions just expressed in the main Eucharistic Prayer and, on the other hand, it anticipates the banquet of the kingdom which is experienced in Sacramental Communion. In the Lord's Prayer, a petition is made for daily food which, for Christians, means preeminently the Eucharistic bread and, in most communities, the cup of salvation. The invitation to recite or chant the Lord's Prayer has been revised:

- "At the Savior's command and formed by divine teaching we dare say..."

After completion of the Lord's Prayer the priest continues:

- "Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our savior, Jesus Christ."

The sign of peace in the Eucharistic celebration is neither a passing peace of this world nor good wishes to one another, but the peace of Christ. This is not a secular greeting such as "Hi, how are you?" It is not a chance to talk to those whom we missed greeting as we entered the church. It is a peace from the soul and to the soul, because we are inseparably united with one another and the Lord through baptism. When appropriate, all gathered extend a sign of Christ's peace to those nearest. In their letter *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, the bishops of the United States wrote, "We encourage every Catholic to make the sign of peace at Mass an authentic sign of our reconciliation with God and with one another. This sign of peace is also a visible sign of our commitment to work for peace as a Christian community. We approach the table of the Lord only after having dedicated ourselves as a Christian community to peace and reconciliation."

Following the sign of peace, the Eucharistic bread is broken (fractioned) while the assembly sings the "Lamb of God" litany. This action of the breaking of the bread speaks our prayer that, even though we are many, we all seek to become one body in the Lord. Thus, the action to fraction is not a utilitarian one to ensure that everyone is communicated. Rather the act is spiritual so that all in a proper disposition can be nourished, including the members not present. The priest's invitation to eat and drink has also been revised:

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- “Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.”

The people’s response will now be:

- “Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.”

The Fraction Rite and the Reception of Communion are connected because the consecrated Bread, which was once whole, has been fractioned into many pieces and shared with us who are many. As the many receive the one Bread of Life and the Cup of Eternal Salvation, which is Christ, we are made one. This unity in Christ is demonstrated most clearly by receiving hosts consecrated at the Mass attended. As the priest receives Communion, the appropriate antiphon can be recited or chanted. If so desired, a communion hymn for the entire assembly can be sung through the communion procession.

The Conference of Bishops of the United States has determined that in this country the norm for the reception of Communion will be to stand. Also, a slight bow will be an act of reverence made just prior to reception of the body and blood of Christ. Those who partake in Communion may receive either in the hand or on the tongue, and the decision should be that of the individual receiving, not of the person distributing Communion. If Communion is received in the hand, one hand should be placed flat atop the other. Once the Body of Christ is placed on the hand, the recipient steps to the side of the minister and with the other hand places it reverently into one’s mouth. It is not appropriate to reach out with the fingers and take the host from the person distributing Communion. The Church has made the issue of receiving the body and blood of Christ quite clear: Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it is distributed under both kinds. For in this form, the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident. Still those who receive under one form but not the other are not deprived of any grace necessary for salvation (GIRM 281).

After all have received Communion, the priest and people may spend time together in silent prayer using one posture or a variety of postures. If desired, the congregation may then stand or continue standing after silent prayer to sing a psalm, a canticle of praise, or a hymn (GIRM 88).

The Communion Rite ends with the Prayer After Communion prayed by the principal celebrant in the name of Church that the whole People of God may receive the fruits of the mystery just celebrated (GIRM 89).

Conclusion

These changes in the Communion Rite provide a balance in our awareness of the Body of Christ. Some remind us of the reverence that is appropriate toward the sacramental elements of bread and wine transformed into the Body and Blood of the Lord. Others remind us that Communion unites us not only with Christ but also with all the members of his mystical body, the Church.