

THEOLOGIA PRIMA

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26 MAKE YOUR HAND A THRONE TO RECEIVE THE KING

This week we complete our discussion about the Communion Rite. When I offer formation opportunities for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, I am often asked many questions about this part of the celebration, including the proper way to receive Holy Communion. I would like to address some of these questions below.

How should one properly receive Holy Communion?

In my experience, there can be a lot of emotion around the “proper” way to receive Holy Communion. The *General Instruction to the Roman Missal* (GIRM) and our tradition offer us insight into this question. The GIRM states that the “norm for reception of Holy Communion in . . . the United States is standing,” but that no one should be denied Communion “if they kneel” (160). Standing is the posture of resurrection and, though we are sinners, we come to the table as a people of the resurrection. The GIRM goes on to explain that the communicant should bow his or her head as a sign of reverence before receiving the body and the blood of Christ.

The other debate is whether one should receive Communion in the hand or on the tongue. The GIRM states that either gesture is acceptable (160), but I want to point out that the more ancient gesture is to receive on the hand. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem attest to this noble practice. Around 400. St. Cyril writes:

When you approach, do not extend your hands with palms upward and fingers apart, but make your left hand a throne for your right hand, since the latter is to receive the King.

Receiving Communion on the tongue developed in the Middle Ages out of fear that the sacred species would be desecrated in some way. However one chooses to receive Holy Communion, it must be done with great reverence. Such reverence is something which we can all agree to seek more fully, no matter our posture.



Should we receive under both kinds?

The GIRM says that Holy Communion distributed under both forms is a fuller sign of the Heavenly banquet (281). No one is required to receive under both species, but the Church does encourage it. If one only partakes in the host or only in the cup, they must remember they are receiving the fullness of Christ – body, soul, and divinity.

Why does the priest, deacon, or lay minister remove hosts from the tabernacle before Communion?

The primary reason hosts are reserved in the tabernacle is for the sick/homebound, but in some cases there are extra remaining after Mass that cannot be consumed. The norm is “that the faithful . . . receive the Lord’s Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass (GIRM 85), and so the use of pre-consecrated hosts at mass should be minimal.

We will continue this discussion in the next article.