

Take and Eat

Receiving Holy Communion in the Hand

When the Holy Father granted permission for the option of receiving Holy Communion in the hand, he expressed concern that there be adequate instruction of the faithful so that the practice will “strengthen their faith” and “increase the sense of their dignity.”

Communion in the hand is a return to traditional practice. The Last Supper was a ritual meal, following the customs of the time. The first Christians continued to celebrate the Eucharist as a sacred, sacrificial meal. Communion in the hand was the universal practice then. Not until the ninth century does it become, in scattered places, the “privilege” of clerics. Nor did the gradual changeover to communion on the tongue arise from a greater reverence for the Eucharist.

The change in the shape of bread seems to have been a greater factor, along with a false sense of unworthiness on the part of the communicants.

Communion in the hand can deepen our faith in the dignity of every Christian as a member of the body of Christ, including our own personal dignity.

Irreverence of any kind must be avoided. One of the abuses of our time is the automatic and routine reception of Holy Communion at every Mass without prayerful involvement with the Lord or the community. An exaggerated sense of unworthiness must give way to humble gratitude. Communion in the hand can help remove disrespect for the human

person and more particularly, the human body, and does not imply that some parts of the human body are less worthy than others. As a prayerful gesture, it can do much to restore to adult Christians a sense of dignity, maturity and holiness.

How to take Communion in the hand

This is how St. Cyril of Jerusalem instructed the newly-baptized during his Easter sermon in the year 348: “When you approach Holy Communion, make the left hand into a throne for the right, which will receive the King. With your hand hollowed, receive the Body of Christ and answer ‘Amen’. Then consume it, taking care not to lose any of it...”

The following steps might be helpful, always remembering that the first rule is reverence.

1. Bow your head as a gesture of reverence before the sacrament.
2. Place one open palm on top of the other.
3. After you have replied “Amen” to “The Body of Christ,” the minister will place the Host in your open hand.
4. Step aside to make room for the next communicant.
5. With your lower hand, take the Host and place it in your mouth. Only after this return to your place.

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