

How Catholics Worship: What we do and why we do it.

The Communion Rite Part II



Office of
Evangelization and Worship

Among the many daily human activities in which we participate meals often carry the most “baggage.” There are certain customs and traditions that have been handed down to us in our families that we simply take for granted because this is the way we do it in our home; this is the way we eat and drink together at table. The kids need to be reminded to wash their hands. We do not begin to eat until everyone is seated. We make sure everyone is served in order. We do not leave the table unless excused. All these rituals, insignificant as they may seem, help us to remain civil, respectful and charitable. The family table becomes a holy place when people eat together.

The same can obviously be said of the Lord’s table. There are certain important things we do as we approach the sacred meal we call Holy Communion.

First, out of respect for the sacred food and drink we are about to receive, we fast one hour from solid food. Second, we understand that we need to be in union with Christ and his Church if we wish to receive Holy Eucharist. If we are conscious of serious sin, therefore, the appropriate thing to do is to seek out the sacrament of Reconciliation. This is important because if we are alienated from Christ’s Body, we need to first come back into union with one another. We would feel the need to do the same at home if we had a “falling out” with one or other members of our family.

How do we come to the table? Interestingly, because of the physical configuration of our churches and the number of people who are gathered there, we are actually not at the table; we are at our seats for most of the Mass. Therefore, when invited to the table, we move forward together with our sisters and brothers and, indeed, with the whole Church throughout the world. After all, we are a Catholic family, no matter where we happen to worship.



We are doing all this not as private individuals, but as a community, united members of Christ's body.

What is also important to realize, however, is that the Communion procession is not simply a convenient way to get to the table. All processions are sacred movements, but this procession holds first place because we are approaching the place where we are spiritually nourished.

Ideally the action that can help us appreciate this procession is the prayer we sing as we move forward. Some may feel that singing at this time is an intrusion on their own prayer. In fact, however, the Communion song helps us realize once again that we are doing all this not as private individuals, but as a community, united members of Christ's body. Of all the times we should realize this, surely coming to Communion would be the time and occasion.

Finally, out of respect for the rest of the family, we join them standing and singing until all have returned from the table. Then we kneel or are seated, as we prefer, to observe some moments of sacred silence, our private moment with our God.

If it is true that our ordinary daily traditions and customs have a way of forming us into groups and families, then surely these Catholic rubrics for receiving Holy Communion can also be trusted to bond us into that special family we joined once-upon-a-time at baptism.