

RECEIVING THE HOLY EUCHARIST IN REVERENCE



Communion-on-the-tongue is the preferred manner of receiving the Holy Eucharist in reverence. Here's why:

When Pope Paul VI promulgated *Memoriale Domini* in 1969, he authorized Communion in the hand as an indulgent under limited, very specific rules. At the time, the pope warned:

A change in a matter of such moment, based on a most ancient and venerable tradition, does not merely affect discipline. It carries certain dangers with it which may arise from the new manner of administering Holy Communion: the danger of a loss of reverence for the august sacrament of the altar, of profanation, of adulterating the true doctrine.

Therefore, taking into account the remarks and the advice of those whom the Holy Spirit has placed to rule over the Churches, in view of the gravity of the matter and the force of the arguments put forward, the Holy Father has decided not to change the existing way of administering Holy Communion to the faithful.

Thus, Paul VI proclaimed communion on the tongue as the preferred manner of reception in the Roman Catholic Church. This has never changed.

Unfortunately, the pope's explicit warnings became reality. Today, roughly two-thirds of Roman Catholics no longer believe in the Real Presence. Many see the Bread of Life as nothing more than a "meal" or a "symbol," failing to recognize that, at consecration, the bread and wine become the whole and entire Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. A sense of awe and wonder spanning two thousand years of Christianity has, for many, been forgotten or lost.

Did the Early Christians receive on the hand? We have all seen hundreds of paintings, sketches and lithographs that portray the Last Supper, showing the Bread of Life held or distributed by Christ in the hand or on the tongue. But every image is a creation from the mind of the artist. No-one really knows how Christ distributed the Bread of Life, and the gospels can be interpreted either way. Never forget, however, that the Apostles were themselves priests or even bishops; most of us are not.

On the manner of reception, the first 150 years after Christ are historically silent. There are, however, many written documents testifying that, during the centuries of persecution, Communion in the hand was customary and normal. That would make sense, especially considering the Eucharist was taken home for family members, or for another day. This practice seemed to be the manner of reception for the next few hundred years.

That changed in AD 650 when the Synod of Rouen delivered this instruction to the faithful, codifying Communion on the tongue into their eucharistic practice:

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A priest should not put the holy Eucharist into the hands of any lay person or woman, but only into their mouths. . . . If any one will transgress this, because he despises almighty God and dishonors what belongs to God, let him be removed from the altar.

Most scholars attribute the change to on-going abuse of the Holy Eucharist; whatever the reason, Communion in the hand began a slow journey into oblivion. It took a few hundred years before the practice was banned at every far-flung church, but ultimately Communion on the tongue prevailed. In the Roman Catholic Church, reception on the tongue was the accepted manner for over 1,300 years.

Outside of the Church, the 1500s witnessed Protestantism resurrecting “Communion in the hand” as a protest against the Catholic belief in the Real Presence. Protestantism had defined the Eucharist to be nothing more than a “meal” or a “symbol”. To show their disbelief, Protestant leaders mandated Communion in the hand while standing.

Just four hundred years later, with the 1969 proclamation of *Memoriale Domini*, Roman Catholics followed the Protestant model – Communion in the hand while standing. After half a century, the results of this innovation are, at a minimum, tragic. Not only do most Roman Catholics no longer believe in the Real Presence, the vast majority of us no longer attend Sunday Mass.

We often hear Catholics profess that there are more serious issues than “how” one receives the Holy Eucharist. Others claim that if we receive worthily in our hearts, then it makes little difference if we receive Him in our hands. Yet the wondrous and miraculous gift of the Blessed Sacrament deserves all the adoration and protection we can offer. The Holy Eucharist is truly and substantially the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus, a divine gift of inestimable value beckoning us along the road to salvation. There is no greater action we can possibly do than to receive the Eucharist worthily with the greatest possible reverence.

Communion on the tongue is the preferred manner of receiving Holy Communion in reverence, and always will be.

**O Sacrament most holy, O Sacrament divine!
All praise and all thanksgiving, Be every moment Thine!**

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