



You may have noticed that people receive Communion in different ways. Is there a right way? **How exactly should we receive Holy Communion?** First of all, it is important to notice that we *receive* Communion. Holy Communion is our greatest gift, a gift to be received through the generous love of Jesus. Holy Communion should never be taken by our own action. As *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states, “It is not permitted for the faithful to take the consecrated Bread or the sacred chalice by themselves and, still less, to hand them on from one to another among themselves. The norm established for the Dioceses of the United States of America is that Holy Communion is to be received standing, unless an individual member of the faithful wishes to receive Communion while kneeling” (*GIRM*, 160). Adjustments are possible for those unable to stand or kneel. Many churches have areas where Communion is brought directly to the pew for those who find walking to receive Communion difficult. The instruction makes clear that we are receiving the gift of Holy Communion and not taking this gift for ourselves, a truth we emphasize in the posture we observe as we receive the Sacred Host. For those receiving in the hand, we hold our hands steady with an open palm throne to receive Our Lord truly present. For those receiving on the tongue, we are still as we wait for the placement of the Sacred Host on the tongue.

Why Do We Bow before Receiving Communion?

I often see people bowing before approaching the minister. Should I do that also? Yes! As the *GIRM* continues, “When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the Sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister... When Holy Communion is received under both kinds, the sign of reverence is also made before receiving the Precious Blood” (*GIRM*, 160). As I have often shared when teaching children about postures of prayer and reverence, our sign of reverence actually provides an opportunity for our bodies to help remind our minds and hearts who we believe is before us. We believe that Jesus, Almighty God, Second Person of the Trinity, is there before us in the Holy Eucharist. Our bow helps us recall that he really is there and that we believe he really is there! Like so many parts of our lives that are repeated regularly, we may risk just going through the motions at this part of the Mass. However, if we do that, we would be overlooking Jesus truly there before us! The next time you are approaching Holy Communion, take the challenge of really bowing with reverence and recall Jesus is there. Perhaps pray to yourself those words of St. Thomas: “My Lord and My God” ([John 20:28](#)). Along these lines, the Diocese of Peoria says, “Even the procession toward Communion is a great ritual act, as we humbly approach the Lord Jesus. The Bishops of the United States have asked that we make a bow as a sign of reverence toward the Eucharist before receiving... It is an encounter as we receive him—Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity!” (*A Study of the Mass*, pp. 19–20).

Practical Tips for Receiving Communion

How about some practical tips? Absolutely! As I mentioned above, one great way of being in the mode of “receiving” is to stay still as the minister brings the Host to you. As a practical note, I have often noticed that some people will lunge forward toward the Sacred Host, or at times those intending to receive on the tongue will even bite the host or lick upward. For those receiving in the hand, I have noticed that sometimes people will already be closing their hand before the Host is placed there. I presume these might be ways of trying to help the minister; however, it truly is easiest and perhaps the most prayerful if you remain still until Jesus in the Sacred Host comes to you.

For those receiving in the hand, Fr. Oury notes that St. Cyril offers instruction: “When you approach, do not come with palms of the hand spread flat, nor with fingers wide apart... [M]ake him a throne with your left [hand]. In the hollow of your hand receive the Body of Christ and answer: Amen... [C]onsume [The Host] and be careful that none of it be lost... Tell me, if you were given some grains of gold, would you not guard them with the greatest care so as not to lose any one of them and be the poorer? Should you not be even more careful not to let drop the least particle of what is more precious than gold or precious stones?” (*The Mass*, pp. 121–2; *Mystagogical Catechesis* 5, 21). St. Cyril reminds us to have a worthy reception of the King of Kings, certainly both in receiving him well and also in honoring his presence in even the smallest fragments. St. Cyril invites us to examine our hands and fingers for any particles of the Eucharist after we have received Our Lord.

One last practical tip might be to think about what you are saying when you say, “Amen.” I encourage you to make it a vigorous *Amen*, reminding yourself that word means, “Jesus, I believe you are really here.” This *Amen* is an important prayer of faith at the moment of receiving Holy Communion. Charles Belmonte reflects further on the *Amen*: “Yes, Lord, I believe. I love and I hope in you. I know my time of waiting is over, for my hope is now made into a reality which fulfills the deepest needs of my faith and my charity. You are mine, and I am yours... My soul worships you in stillness” (*Understanding the Mass*, p. 187). Let us make this beautiful prayer of faith our own, the next time and every time we say *Amen* and receive the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus!