



**Step-by-Step Walk Through the Mass
Do This in Remembrance of Me, Part 73,
Communion under Both Forms
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Last time, we addressed making a sign of reverence before receiving Communion in the sacred host or in the chalice. This time, we consider receiving from the chalice in particular. You may have noticed differences in what churches do for Communion. Someone who travels might encounter parishes where the Precious Blood is offered and others where everyone receives the sacred host without receiving from the chalice.

Let's look at The General Instruction of the Roman Missal: "It is most desirable that the faithful, just as the Priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord's Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and that, in the cases where this is foreseen, they partake of the chalice, so that even by means of the signs Communion may stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated" (GIRM, 85). The point here is to emphasize that receiving Communion itself should help unite us to the Holy Sacrifice—through hosts consecrated at the Mass and, (then notice) "where this is foreseen," from the chalice.

When Do We Receive Communion from the Chalice?

So, when are members of the faithful able to receive from the chalice? The GIRM reminds us that the bishops have the authority to give guidelines for the manner of receiving Communion in their dioceses. This is because the bishops are the caretakers of the liturgy within their dioceses. The GIRM does provide some guidelines for the bishops to follow: "Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it takes place under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clearer expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the connection between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Kingdom of the Father" (GIRM, 281). What is this paragraph saying with "both kinds" (or sometimes we see the description "both forms")? The reference here is to Communion being offered under the form of the sacred host and in the chalice. That is, that Communion would be offered in forms that involve both eating and drinking.

Why Don't We Always Receive from the Chalice?

So, why don't we always have Communion under both forms? Believe it or not, one simple reason is practicality. Having numerous people drink from the chalice requires either a very large chalice or a number of chalices. Depending on the size of the parish, this could be no problem; but in parishes that are very large, this can become a challenge. In one parish where I visited, there were 10 to 20 extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at every Mass. As you might imagine, getting all these folks prepared and to their stations was quite a process. Another practical reason for some bishops and pastors is concern for reverence and the worry over potentially spilling the Precious Blood. Additionally, with heightened sensitivity to health, for some, the sharing of the chalice is personally challenging.

Along with some of these practical reasons, there is also a faith consideration based on our belief that Jesus is really and completely present under either form of Communion. The GIRM states, "Sacred pastors should take care to ensure that the faithful... are made aware by the most suitable means possible of the Catholic teaching on the form of Holy Communion as laid down by the Ecumenical Council of Trent. Above all, they should instruct the Christian faithful that the Catholic faith teaches that Christ, whole and entire, and the true Sacrament, is received even under only one species, and hence that as regards the resulting fruits, those who receive under only one species are not deprived of any grace that is necessary for salvation" (GIRM, 282). This text reminds pastors to make sure people know that receiving the host is receiving the whole Christ; receiving from the chalice is receiving the whole Christ; receiving both forms is receiving the whole Christ. There have been times in history where this teaching was not necessarily clear; for some, receiving Communion under one form can assist with that clarity.

Who Decides When We Receive from the Chalice?

Ultimately, the decision is up to the bishop, who can choose to extend the decision to the individual pastor. Bishops are charged to do whatever they think will be most helpful to people spiritually, while at the same time guarding the true faith and reverence for Jesus present in the Holy Sacrament. So, when you travel and notice that some parishes have Communion under both forms and some do not, know that the bishop and pastor have decided, according to the instruction of the GIRM, to do what they think is best for their parishes and people at the present time. As always, if we don't understand the wisdom of our leaders in these decisions, we are invited to pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance and wisdom, and continue to pray for true unity in Christ!