

Eucharist - practical information

The **Holy Eucharist** is the most important of the seven sacraments because, in this and in no other sacrament, we receive the very body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. Holy Communion is an intimate encounter with Christ, in which we sacramentally receive Christ into our bodies, that we may be more completely assimilated into his. “The Eucharist builds the Church,” as Pope John Paul II said (Redemptor Hominis 20).

It is also the very channel of eternal life: Jesus himself.

In John’s gospel, Jesus summarized the reasons for receiving Holy Communion when he said:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day... This is the bread which came down from heaven, ... he who eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:53–58).

Because of the gravity of Jesus' teaching on receiving the Eucharist, the Church encourages Catholics to receive frequent Communion, even daily Communion if possible, and mandates reception of the Eucharist at least once a year during the Easter season. Before going to Communion, however, there are several things one needs to know.

The Catholic Church and Holy Communion

The Catholic Church sets out specific guidelines regarding how we should prepare ourselves to receive the Lord's body and blood in Communion. First, you must be in a state of grace. This is an absolute requirement that can never be dispensed. To receive the Eucharist without sanctifying grace in your soul profanes the Eucharist in the most grievous manner.

A mortal sin is any sin whose matter is grave and which has been committed willfully and with knowledge of its seriousness. For further information on what constitutes a mortal sin, see the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Second, you must have been to confession since your last mortal sin.

The requirement for sacramental confession can be dispensed if four conditions are fulfilled: (1) there must be a grave reason to receive Communion (for example, danger of death), (2) it must be physically or morally impossible to go to confession first, (3) the person must already be in a state of grace through perfect contrition, and (4) he must resolve to go to confession as soon as possible.

Third, you must believe in the doctrine of transubstantiation. “For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself” (1 Cor. 11:29). [Transubstantiation](#) means more than the Real Presence. According to transubstantiation, the bread and wine are actually transformed into the actual body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ, and only the appearances of bread and wine remain.

Fourth, you must observe the Eucharistic fast. Canon law states, “One who is to receive the most Holy Eucharist is to abstain from any food or drink, with the exception only of water and medicine, for at least the period of one hour before Holy Communion” (CIC 919 §1). Elderly people, those who are ill, and their caretakers are excused from the Eucharistic fast (CIC 191 §3).

Provided they are in a state of grace and have met the above requirements, Catholics should receive the Eucharist frequently (CIC 898).

Non-Catholics Receiving Communion

The guidelines for receiving Communion, which are issued by the U.S. bishops and published in many missalettes, explain, “Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life, and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to Communion. Eucharistic sharing in exceptional circumstances by other Christians requires permission according to the directives of the diocesan bishop and the provisions of canon law.”

It is normally impossible for non-Catholic Christians to receive Holy Communion.

Another reason that many non-Catholics may not ordinarily receive Communion is for their own protection, since many reject the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Scripture warns that it is very dangerous for one not believing in the Real Presence to receive Communion: “For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself” (1 Cor. 11:29).

Possible Exceptions for Receiving Communion

However, there are circumstances when non-Catholics may receive Communion from a Catholic priest. This is especially the case when it comes to Eastern Orthodox Christians, who share the same faith concerning the nature of the sacraments.

How to Receive Communion.

Communion may be received either in the hand or on the tongue. Around the year A.D. 390, Cyril of Jerusalem indicated that the early Church practiced Communion in the hand when he instructed his audience: “Approaching, therefore, come not with thy wrists extended, or thy fingers open; but make thy left hand as if a throne for thy right, which is on the eve of receiving the King. And having hallowed thy palm, receive the body of Christ, saying after it, Amen. (Catechetical Lectures 23:22).

The Congregation of the Sacraments and Divine Worship permitted the U.S. Bishops' Conference to authorize reception of Communion in the hand on July 25, 1977. No priest, deacon, acolyte, or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may refuse a communicant Communion on the tongue. Likewise, once the local bishop has introduced Communion in the hand, none may refuse a communicant Communion in the hand.

The Church mandates that: "The faithful are to be recommended not to omit to make a proper thanksgiving after Communion.

After receiving Jesus into one's own body and being drawn more closely into his, how could one do any less?