



IMPORTANT MEMORANDUM

To: Priests, Deacons, Pastoral Leaders, and Business Managers

From: Daniel J. Demski

Re: Normative Posture for the Reception of Holy Communion

Date: Memorial of Saint Januarius (19 September 2023)

I am the true vine and you are the branches, says the Lord.

Whoever remains in me, and I in him, bears fruit in plenty.

-Communion Antiphon, Common of Martyrs: For One Martyr, no. 2.

During this Parish Year, of the National Eucharistic Revival, it is commendable to witness an increase in devotion to Christ truly present in the Most Holy Eucharist. This is surely a sign of the outpouring of grace inspired by the Holy Spirit.

As Catholics, we fully participate in the celebration of the Eucharist when we receive Holy Communion. We are encouraged to receive Communion devoutly and frequently. In order to be properly disposed to receive Communion, participants should not be conscious of grave sin and normally should have fasted for one hour.

(Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America, 5).

With such an increase of Eucharistic devotion there are times when persons, with the best of intentions, have unknowingly requested and/or introduced practices into the Sacred Liturgy which are unforeseen and perhaps not permissible. A recent practice has emerged in some parish churches with the placement or construction of kneelers in front of the sanctuary. These kneelers are apparently an attempt to encourage all, or accommodate some, members of the faithful to receive Holy Communion while kneeling. This action has caused confusion among many members of the clergy and faithful. Consultation with the Diocesan Office for Divine Worship, prior to the placement of kneelers, could have avoided this confusion from occurring. Therefore, in order to preserve our common unity and in Christian charity, it is imperative to remind everyone of the normative posture for the reception of Holy Communion.

After reviewing the Church's documents as well as recently consulting the Secretariat for Divine Worship of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), the following information is provided as a means of catechesis and instruction.

Standing is the Normative Posture for Receiving Holy Communion in the United States of America

In paragraph six of their reflection, [The Reception of Holy Communion at Mass | USCCB](#), the U.S. Bishops remind us that during the Communion procession,

We are the Body of Christ, moving forward to receive the Christ who makes us one with himself and with one another. Our procession should move with dignity; our bearing should be that of those who know they have been redeemed by Christ and are coming to receive their God!

The Bishops further say,

The *General Instruction* asks each country's Conference of Bishops to determine the posture to be used for the reception of Communion and the act of reverence to be made by each person as he or she receives Communion. In the United States, the body of Bishops has determined that "[t]he norm... is that Holy Communion is to be received standing, unless an individual member of the faithful wishes to receive Communion while kneeling" and that a bow is the act of reverence made by those receiving (no. 160). This norm is supported by an Instruction by the Holy See regarding the Eucharist: "In distributing Holy Communion it is to be remembered that 'sacred ministers may not deny the sacraments to those who seek them in a reasonable manner, are rightly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them' (Code of Canon Law, can. 843 § 1; cf. can. 915). Hence any baptized Catholic who is not prevented by law must be admitted to Holy Communion. Therefore, it is not licit to deny Holy Communion to any of Christ's faithful solely on the grounds, for example, that the person wishes to receive the Eucharist kneeling or standing" (*Redemptionis Sacramentum*, no. 91).

Any individual person who chooses to kneel to receive Communion is not to be reprimanded, instructed to stand, or refused the Holy Eucharist. Kneelers, which are not foreseen in the liturgical norms, are not to be used.

The 2004 Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* further states,

The faithful should receive Communion kneeling or standing, as the Conference of Bishops will have determined, with its acts having received the *recognitio* of the Apostolic See. However, if they receive Communion standing, it is recommended that they give due reverence before the reception of the Sacrament, as set forth in the same norms (90).

Thus, the faithful are to be reminded that, standing before the minister of Holy Communion, the act of reverence shown just before receiving Communion is a **bow of the head**, as noted in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (160). Otherwise, they may mistakenly believe that kneeling is the normative act or an act deemed “more reverent” than standing.

The *General Instruction* further states,

If Communion of the Blood of Christ is carried out by communicants’ drinking from the chalice, each communicant, after receiving the Body of Christ, moves to the minister of the chalice and stands facing him (286).

The presence of kneelers would violate the norms established by the USCCB and would be an impediment to the Communion procession by their size, placement and number. **A communicant coming forward to receive Holy Communion in the normative posture of standing is not to feel that he/she must use, or should opt to use, a kneeler.**

Individual members of the faithful who may desire to kneel, but are physically unable to do so on their own, should be catechized to receive Holy Communion in the normative posture of standing. Those who are physically unable to come forward in procession may receive Holy Communion in their pews/seats as they may be accustomed to doing.

Therefore, in order to ensure our common unity as the Body of Christ and to be in conformity with liturgical norms, Bishop Daniel Thomas instructs that the following actions be undertaken immediately:

- **Parishes, chapels, or places where Mass is celebrated are to remove any and all kneelers placed for the use of the faithful for the reception of Holy Communion.**
- **In those places where kneelers had been erroneously introduced, the faithful are to be catechized in the normative posture of standing to receive Holy Communion. If communicants wish to kneel on their own, they cannot and will not be denied the Eucharist.**
- **Catechesis on the reverential act of bowing one’s head before receiving the Holy Eucharist is to be provided to all the faithful, a most appropriate reminder during this time of National Eucharistic Revival.**

Finally, as a means of further clarification, at the two sites in the Diocese of Toledo approved for the celebration of Mass using the *Roman Missal* of 1962,

Saint Joseph Church, Toledo and the
Chapel of Saint Michael the Archangel Parish, Downtown Findlay,

the use of Communion rails where the faithful kneel for reception of Holy Communion is prescribed by the *Roman Missal* of 1962 and is proper when this Mass is celebrated at these two locations.

Together, praying the words of our Diocesan Prayer for the Eucharistic Revival, let us thank our Heavenly Father for the gift of his Son in the Holy Eucharist and implore him to “reawaken our belief in His presence in the Eucharist and deepen our understanding of, love for and living out of this great Mystery. May this Sacrament of his sacrificial love be for us the sign of unity and the bond of charity. Nourish us through our worthy reception of the Body and Blood of your Son, so that we may enjoy communion with you and with one another”.