

Frequently Asked Questions about Communion

Q. What do Catholics believe they are receiving when they come to Holy Communion?

A. We believe that we are receiving the very Body and Blood of Christ Himself. At the Last Supper Jesus said, "This is my body which is given for you" and offering His disciples the cup of wine said, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins." (See Luke 22 and Matthew 26). In the Gospel of John we read: "Jesus said to them, 'Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.'" (John 6:53-56)

Q. Are we still supposed to fast for one hour before receiving Communion?

A. Yes. Whoever is to receive the blessed Eucharist is to abstain for at least one hour before Holy Communion from all food and drink with the sole exception of water and medicine.

Q. Why do we fast?

A. We fast because it helps us to prepare for and appreciate the sacredness of such a great gift. Fasting reminds us of just what we are doing: receiving the very Body and Blood of Christ. Fasting for an hour helps us to set that time aside for the Lord, lest this very holy gift become common.

Q. What about gum or candy?

A. We should never come to Holy Communion with gum or candy in our mouth. In fact, we should refrain from chewing gum or eating candy whenever we are in church, not just before Communion.

Q. How should we receive Holy Communion?

A. As the person ahead of us is receiving Communion we should offer a simple bow of reverence with our head and then step forward. We receive Holy Communion either in our hands or directly on the tongue. If we receive in the hands we should take care that they are clean (as a sign of reverence) and place one hand over the other and raise them up high, forming a throne with our hands to receive Jesus. As the priest or minister places the host in our hands and says "The Body of Christ" we should respond loudly and clearly "Amen."

Q. Can I take the host directly from the priest or minister before it is placed in my hand?

A. No. The Eucharist is God's great gift to us and like all gifts it is something that we receive, not something that we reach out and take.

Q. Can non-Catholics receive Communion?

A. In ordinary circumstances, non-Catholics are not permitted to receive Holy Communion. The very action of receiving Communion says that we believe it is the Body and Blood of Christ and that we share in the whole life of the Catholic Church. Inviting non-Catholics (who do not hold to our same faith) to Communion can be an obstacle to one day reaching full communion by blurring the differences in belief among Christian denominations. We long for the day when we will all be united in the same faith and can give expression to that unity by sharing in the Eucharist together.

Q. What about going to Confession (Reconciliation) before receiving Communion?

A. Anyone who has committed serious sin must receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before receiving Communion. Receiving Communion is the most intimate expression of our relationship with Jesus. If we have sinned seriously and wounded our relationship with Jesus we must be reconciled with Him before going to Communion.