

X. Proceeding with Communion, I

This is the tenth in a series of eleven or so articles on the celebration of the Mass. Article #11 is entitled, *Proceeding with Communion, II*

Introduction to the Rite of Communion in GIRM

Most of what we have seen so far in this review of the *General Instruction* has been rather benign, in the sense of non-controversial. It is significant that the larger number of changes in the ritual actions of the Mass occur within the Rite of Communion.

Before noting those changes, we should reflect on the canonical weight of this document. We should also consider what in fact the GIRM changed and what it in fact simply repeated from the 1975 *Instruction*.

The Canonical Weight of the *General Instruction*

The 2002 *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, like the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, provides universal law for the liturgy of the Church. It represents one of the highest forms of law giving in the Roman Catholic Church.

"The GIRM is important to us because it represents the theological and spiritual reasons for celebrating the Mass properly. And, even though there are no substantive changes in the way we will celebrate Mass in the future, we and our people are going to have to make some adaptations to meet the requirements of the *Instruction*...

"The revisions in the GIRM are the result of an ongoing process of renewal which is faithful to the directives of Vatican Council II. They have been made more necessary now because of the developments which have taken place since the last major revision in 1975. In 1983, a new Code of Canon Law established some legislative directives, many having to do with sacramental celebrations... Various decisions and other directives issued by the Vatican Congregations also have been incorporated into the GIRM...

"The GIRM presents some ritual changes and refinements in the gestures, postures and words used at Mass. It also offers a reflection on the meaning and proper use of "sacred things" at Mass: the sanctuary furnishings, vestments, sacred vessels, and art used in the liturgy..."

(*Letter of Archbishop Elden Francis Curtiss to priests and deacons of the archdiocese of Omaha, NE September 2, 2003*)

Individual conferences of bishops, like the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, can adapt the universal law to *particular* or *local* circumstances.

The USCCB would have to propose a change to a universal law, approve the proposal with a 2/3-majority vote, and send the proposal to Rome to be recognized by the Holy See. In this way, particular law would adapt or focus the universal law for a region. Further, each conference of bishops has the right to request an *indult*, that is, an exception, to a universal law from Rome.

For example, the bishops of the United States requested and received an *indult*, an exception that allows Eucharistic Ministers to help purify the vessels following distribution of Communion. This indult has been given until June of 2005.

The Communion Rite includes:

**The Lord's Prayer
the Sign of Peace
the Breaking of the Bread
(the Fraction Rite)
Communion
the Prayer After Communion**

It will be interesting for many of us to note that most of the items on the list below are only provisions already found in the 1975 GIRM and *not* new directives. The few items that are, in fact new directives, will be noted by four asterisks (****). Here, we refer to the "Appendix" from a fine work, *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal 1969-2002: A Commentary* by Dennis Smolarski, SJ.

A List of Procedures for the Rite of Communion in the Archdiocese of Omaha

➤ **Ministers of Communion – Ordinary and Extraordinary**

The following set of directives is taken directly from the letter of Archbishop Curtiss already cited.

The ordinary ministers of Holy Communion are priests and deacons. Extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist may be used only when there is not a sufficient number of ordinary ministers to distribute Communion within a reasonable time. Concelebrating priests and deacons may not defer this responsibility to extraordinary ministers.

Only the celebrant and concelebrating priests and deacons may participate in the fraction rite prior to Communion. Extraordinary Ministers can no longer be involved in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread or in pouring the Eucharistic wine into separate containers prior to Communion.

Extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist are not to approach the altar until the celebrant has received Communion. If a deacon is present... The deacon and extraordinary ministers may not receive Eucharist until the celebrant has received. EME's receive the vessels containing the Eucharist for distribution from the celebrant.

Only the celebrant or concelebrating priest(s) or deacon may remove the Ciborium from the tabernacle prior to Holy Communion. After Communion one of the ordained ministers must return the Eucharist to the tabernacle.

In this archdiocese, if there is no concelebrating priest or deacon, and the tabernacle is a distance from the altar, then out of practical necessity, an EME may remove and return it to the tabernacle after Communion. This is the only situation in which an EME may remove or return the ciborium to the tabernacle.

Because of an indult granted previously to the U.S. bishops, for pastoral reasons EME's may help with the purification of the sacred vessels following distribution of Holy Communion. Again, this indult is given until June, 2005. (****)

"When you approach, do not extend your hands with palms upward and fingers apart; but make your left hand a throne for your right hand, since the latter is to receive the King. Then, while answering 'Amen,' receive the body of Christ in the hollow of your hand... Then, after receiving the body of Christ, approach his blood..."
(St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catecheses* V, 27)

➤ **Receiving Communion – the Body and Blood of Christ**

Communion under both kinds is a more complete sign of the Eucharistic presence of the Lord... [however] our people are not required to receive the Eucharist under both species if it is not their wish.

Regarding the practice of intinction, people are not permitted to take the host and then insert it in the cup themselves. Only the celebrant may distribute Communion by way of intinction to those who wish to receive Communion in this manner.

➤ **Receiving Communion – Gesture of Reverence**

The GIRM... indicates that those receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord should make a sign of reverence to be determined by the bishops of each country. The U.S. bishops determined that the sign

to be given before Communion is a bow, a simple gesture through which we express our reverence for the Eucharistic Lord and give honor to Him. (****)

Since it is already implemented in the archdiocese, we will simply continue with it.

However, I ask that all our people be instructed from time-to-time to bow their heads before they receive the [Body and Blood of Christ].

I remind our pastors that the Holy See has directed that those distributing Communion may not refuse Communion to persons who kneel to receive... our catechesis [is that] the ordinary way to receive Holy Communion now is standing so there is no interruption in the line of people coming to receive.

Also, communicants have the option to receive the sacred Host in the hand or on the tongue.

It is one of the adaptations for the Church in the U.S. that permission is given for communicants to stand or kneel during the period of religious silence after they have received. Communion. Because of the tradition in this archdiocese of kneeling following Communion, we will continue this practice...

"That both the giver and the maker of the *Spiritual Exercises* may be of greater help and benefit to each other, it should be presupposed that every good Christian ought to be more eager to put a good interpretation on a neighbor's statement than to condemn it.

"Further, if one cannot interpret it favorably, one should ask how the other means it. If that meaning is wrong, one should correct the person with love; and if this is not enough, one should search out every appropriate means through which, by understanding the statement in a good way, it may be saved."
(St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, #22)

For discussion/reflection:

- What did you learn new from this article? What did you find helpful here? What did you find challenging?
- St. Ignatius asks any person making the *Spiritual Exercises* always to "put a good interpretation" on any statement by a neighbor.
- What is the "good interpretation" of the GIRM that will help the Church worship with greater depth.
- What is the "good interpretation" of those who might balk at the directives of the GIRM?
- In that vein, what is the Church trying to get at – what deeper or greater good does it seek – by putting forth these directives?

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