

XI. Proceeding with Communion II

This is the eleventh in a series of eleven or so articles on the Mass. The final article is entitled, *The Challenge / Opportunity of the GIRM*

In this article, we will look at some few, final aspects of the Communion Rite and the Concluding Rite. We might just call these reflections...

I. GIRM – Asides:

A. Questions About Communion or the Communion Rite

1. An Excursus on the Faithful Holding Hands at the Lord's Prayer

The *General Instruction* does not address in any way, shape, or form what has appeared as a “tradition” in some U.S. parishes – that practice of holding hands at the Our Father. It does not rule it out; it does not encourage it. That does not stop many today from either encouraging it or condemning it.

The gesture of holding hands at the Lord's Prayer seems to have begun shortly after the Vatican II reforms. For many the gesture manifests the unity of the community. For others, it strengthens the connections between members of the community. In either case, holding hands has become almost synonymous with parishes that focus on the horizontal element of the Church gathering for worship. Maybe it's more than that.

So, here's a thought: This writer understands holding hands at the Lord's Prayer as an interim gesture. The two key parts of the Liturgy of the Eucharist that are *supposed* to manifest the Church's unity *at the level of experience* actually don't.

Few parishes experience either the Eucharistic Prayer or the reception of Communion as manifestations of the Church as one at prayer. Most of us perceive these two parts of the rite as more individualistic times.

When our praying communities are able to enter into the Eucharistic Prayer and the reception of Communion as profound communal events – actions that actually *do* express and deepen our unity – then holding hands at the Lord's Prayer needs to be understood as an interim gesture.

It points us toward a communal awareness that, hopefully, will be part of our future praying.

2. Fasting

The Church expects the faithful fast from food and drink (water and medication are permitted) at least one hour prior to receiving the Eucharist.

Many of us “Cradle Catholics” who are, say, 45 years old and older, will recall the requirement of fasting 3 hours before receiving Communion. Some of us “geezer” will even remember, hopefully, the fast from midnight! (Perhaps this practice led to the popularity of families attending early Mass.) The word, “breakfast,” points to that meal people enjoyed after returning home from Mass.

Remember how only water and medication is permitted during the hour before receiving Communion? Remember some precocious children debated about what one could eat and still go to Communion? “Can we just taste some candy, or mints, or gum and not swallow it?”

a. Why should we fast today?

For some, fasting helps them *anticipate* the gift of Christ they will be receiving in Eucharist. For them, fasting sets *this* Food apart from any other food we may take in during the day.

For others, fasting seems to be a sort of “cleansing the system.” Since they are to take into their bodies this holiest of gifts from God, fasting not only increases their awareness of what they are receiving, but it also allows that which is less pure and holy to emptied, making room for Christ.

Here's a thought #2: Fasting allows us to be in touch with our hunger. In fact, when fasting, don't we all pretty much just think about food anyway? Fasting can allow me to entertain the question, “What do I truly hunger for?” Or, “What truly satisfies my hunger?”

Many folks get (more) irritable when fasting. Such an attitude could allow us to ask, “How do I like being hungry?” It can allow us to be in solidarity with the hungry people of the world, who also might be irritable about not getting food.

Finally, fasting could put some of us in touch with our emptiness or loneliness, asking again, “What do I really long for? What do I truly desire?” Questions such as these could be nudge us to a greater awareness, or consciousness, of the One we receive, for whom we truly hunger, as we open our hands to receive the Bread of Life.

The practice traditionally called the *Easter Duty* is still required of us. These minimal requirements are the Church's way of reminding us of the importance of regularly receiving the Eucharist.

3. Question: "Can one receive Communion more than once a day?"

This question actually does arise from time to time in the parish setting. Good people who, for example, attend a wedding on Saturday morning wonder about receiving Communion at a funeral in the same afternoon.

The *General Instruction* speaks to this pastoral need by enunciating a simple principle: If one attends two different liturgies on the same day, it is appropriate to receive Eucharist at each.

What is important here is "participation in the liturgy." Since the Church gathers to pray at Mass, and each of us is expected to participate in the liturgy we are attending, receiving Communion is actually the fruit of our worship. It is the gift given to the faithful who attend. So, "full, active, and conscious participation" seems to invite / point to / require that we communicate at each liturgy we attend.

This, of course, does rule out the practice of "church-hopping" *just* to receive Communion. The Eucharist is not a "thing" to get, but the culmination of the worship of the Church gathered for liturgy.

4. Preparation for Sunday Liturgy

We all lead busy lives. And the notion of preparing for Sunday Mass has taken quite a beating as the pace of life has sped up in the past decades. Yet, many of us do want to prepare for the liturgy so that our praying may be more fruitful and God's Word and Sacrament may change our lives.

Here's a thought #3: Here are two web sites that do help people prepare for Sunday liturgy. These are offered as aids to busy people in a busy world:

First, the popular site established here at Creighton University that features reflections on the Sunday Scripture Readings by Fr. Larry Gillick, SJ:

<http://www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/daily.html>

Second, the site from Center for Liturgy at St. Louis University, devoted to a broad preparation for Sunday praying: <http://liturgy.slu.edu/>

Third, the site run by Jesuits in Ireland that invites people to pray daily in the quiet of their hearts:

<http://www.jesuit.ie/prayer/>

B. The Communion Rite Concludes: Silence and / or Meditation Song

Once again we note that the *General Instruction* has made silence a constitutive part of the prayer of the worshipping community:

"When the distribution of Communion is finished, as circumstances suggest, the priest and faithful spend some time praying privately. If desired, a psalm or other canticle of praise or a hymn may also be sung by the entire congregation."
(GIRM 88)

Note also that the music recommended for this moment continues the theme of the 'communitarian' nature of the Communion Rite by calling for a piece to be sung by the entire congregation. It is curious that the GIRM does not recognize solo or choral singing as being central at this point.

Prayer after Communion

This prayer has a very ancient form and purpose. It simply asks God to make our Communion fruitful. That, as we go forth into the world, what we have received may have an effect in our lives.

To bring to completion the prayer of the people of God, and also to conclude the entire Communion rite, the priest sings or says the prayer after Communion in which he petitions for the fruits of the mystery just celebrated. [GIRM 89]

II. Concluding Rites

These are quite simple. Their purpose is to send the community forth, blessed by God, to "love and serve the Lord in one another."

"The concluding rites consist of
a. **Brief announcements**, if they are necessary;
b. **The priest's greeting and blessing**, which on certain days and occasions is enriched and expressed in the prayer over the People or another more solemn formula;
c. **The dismissal of the people by the deacon** or the priest, so that each may go out to do good works, praising and blessing God;
d. **The kissing of the altar by the priest** and the deacon, followed by a profound bow to the altar by the priest, the deacon, and the other ministers."
[GIRM 90]

For discussion/reflection:

- What did I learn from this article?
- How might I prepare for Sunday liturgy?
- Do I feel that I am sent to live the mission of the Church by the Concluding Rites?

- How can ministers of the eucharist make the moment of communion a treasured moment of grace?

and invite the reader to endure a brief homilette.

**A Brief Homilette: The Tradition of the Eucharist
1 Corinthians 11:18-26**

"First of all, I hear that when you meet as a church
there are divisions among you,
and to a degree I believe it;
there have to be factions among you in order that
(also) those who are approved among you may
become known. When you meet in one place, then,
it is not to eat the Lord's supper,
for in eating,
each one goes ahead with his own supper,
and one goes hungry while another gets drunk.

"Do you not have houses in which you can eat and
drink? Or do you show contempt for the church of God
and make those who have nothing feel ashamed?
What can I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this
matter I do not praise you.

"For I received from the Lord
what I also handed on to you that the Lord Jesus,
on the night he was handed over, took bread, and,
after he had given thanks, broke it and said, '
This is my body that is for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.'

"In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying,
'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as
often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

Therefore whoever eats the bread
or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to
answer for the body and blood of the Lord.

A person should examine himself,
and so eat the bread and drink the cup.
For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning
the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself.

ideology more than the living God, a community of
persons and our model for true community.

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St. Paul lambasted the people of Corinth for their
divisions at the Eucharist, saying that their lack of
communion demonstrates the invalidity of their
Eucharist! The division between rich and poor
proved to be the problem for the community at that
time. What is it today, if not the divisions that come
to light in the "liturgy wars" between 'liberals' and
'conservatives'.

In each case, it is more important to be right than to
be charitable. In each case, people are worshipping