

Three Minute Liturgical Catechesis

Article 25: Expressing Our Communion

Liturgy is faith made visible. When we celebrate the liturgy, especially the Eucharist, we express what we believe in word and song and action. Sometimes when the liturgy is reformed, it requires us to relearn what the Church really teaches about its meaning.

This may be especially true of our understanding of Holy Communion. For many generations, the liturgy was celebrated without much active involvement by most of the people present. This led us to develop habits and ways of thinking about the liturgy that were very individualistic. We learned to think of Communion as a very private moment between each of us and Jesus.

The problem with that way of thinking is that it overlooks the central meaning and purpose of the Eucharist. Jesus gave us the Eucharist to make us one body in him, so Communion is never a private moment between the individual and the Lord. It is a very personal moment, but it is also communal, for it involves all those around us who share the same body and blood.

There are two primary ways that we express our unity in Christ at the moment of Communion. The first is to join in the Communion procession. As we move to the table of the Lord, we form one procession, a pilgrim people on the move together. Thus it makes sense that we should all stay standing until the procession is completed. A procession is a communal action, a group movement. It is more than just individuals going to the table. We go as one people, as one body of Christ. Respect for each member of the assembly in the procession calls for us to remain standing until all have received.

The second way we express our unity at Communion, as we do throughout the Mass, is with singing. The Communion song is supposed to begin when the priest receives Communion and continue until the last person has received. The singing accompanies the procession in which we are all involved. All of us should be singing throughout, except when we are actually receiving the bread and wine. Even when moving in the procession, we can at least sing the refrain of the song.

When the procession is finished, the singing stops and we all sit together for some time of silent prayer. This is also a shared activity, a time to rest and pray together in the joy of our communion with Christ and one another. Many of us are used to time for quiet prayer as soon as we have received Communion. The liturgy simply calls us to wait until all have received so that we can share this quiet time together.

When we come to the minister of the body of Christ, we bow our heads and say "Amen" to express our reverence for Christ's presence there. We do the same when we come to the minister of the blood of Christ. With our voices and our bodies, we acknowledge the Lord's presence in the bread and wine. Remembering that he is also present in all those who share the meal with us, we use our voices and our bodies to acknowledge his presence there, too. By maintaining a common posture and joining in the singing, we proclaim our faith in the presence of the Lord in all his members as we share his holy meal. It should be obvious to anyone who watches us that we reverence Christ in one another as well as in the bread and wine. Liturgy makes our faith visible.