

To Take or To Receive

Recently I was visiting with some parishioners when the question came up concerning the proper way to receive Christ under both species, His Precious Body and Blood. This wasn't the first time this question has come up, nor is it the first time I've had to react to this situation – someone attempting to dip the Body of Christ into the cup of His Precious Blood. Hence the title of this article – does one come to communion to “take” the Eucharist or to “receive” Him.

This is not an unusual question and definitely not one particular to the Church in the United States. I've read many articles written by Fr. Edward McNamara, a professor of liturgy at the Regina Apostolorum University in Rome, as he takes questions on the proper etiquette and the rubrics that govern the actions of ministers and laity at Sunday Mass and other rituals of the Church. He tries not to RE-answer questions he's already broached, but from year to year a similar question arises where the faithful need to be re-catechized. This is one such area. Where Fr. McNamara has done the legwork, the digging into many historical letters, instructions, and individual interpretations (both good and not-so-good), in this article I will let you know here and now that I use him as my reference for the way I handle this situation today, as my approach (though maybe not perfect or totally in tune with other clergy) is correctly aligned in theological thought.

When we step out of our pews and come forward to meet the minister during Holy Communion, we come to feed on the body of Christ, true food from heaven (manna), given to us by God the Father in the love of the Holy Spirit, to nurture and sustain us spiritually. Two things here: first, “we come” to Jesus, he calls and in faith we answer that call and come to him; and second, Jesus is “given” to us by God, by the Creator through His infinite love for us, so by this reasoning, that Jesus is given to us by the Father, that he OFFERS himself for us and to us, we do not come to “take” Jesus, like a commodity off the shelf, but to “receive” him as the true gift that he is. So we come to receive Jesus, either on the tongue or in the hand, so that we may have him in us and we may remain in him.

So what's the issue?? If someone wishes to receive communion under both species, bread and wine, but, for whatever reason, doesn't want to take the cup to their lips, preferring to dip the host into the cup THEMSELVES, this is what I refer to as TAKING, rather than receiving communion. This dipping of the consecrated host into the cup of the precious blood is called “intinction”, a licit way of receiving communion under both species, but not a regular practice of the Church, at least not in the many parishes where I've attended Mass. I would suspect that one reason, if not the MAIN reason that this is not a regular practice, is the probability of the precious blood dripping from the host onto the floor.

In those instances where an individual is persistent in trying to place the host in the cup, even after I've drawn the cup away, I will request they give me the host that I may dip it in the cup myself, affirm there will be no precious blood dripping from the host, and then offer them “The Body and Blood of Christ” ON THE TONGUE, not in their hands. In this way there is never the chance that one would think that they are “taking” communion, it can only be considered “received”.

It may sound like semantics, playing with words, but the terms we use and how we say them is to construe a particularly clear and meaningful understanding to all, even those who are not familiar with our rites and rituals. When Jesus tells his followers, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life” (JN 6:54), many did not understand him and thus turned away, disappointed in him. They were thinking he was talking cannibalism and missed the reference to the manna from heaven their forefathers had received from God while they wandered the desert. We, on the other hand, make that connection of manna, a gift from God, to the Jesus, “the bread of life” (JN 6:48), “the living bread that came down from heaven” (JN 6:51); again, a gift from God to all mankind. Proper context means a lot. Don’t “take” everything for granted, but come and “receive” a better understanding of Church procedures. Visit the many and various options at <http://www.usccb.org> and <http://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html> to get re-catechized, and grow in wisdom and knowledge of your faith through the grace of God.