

# CELEBRATING FIRST HOLY COMMUNION

## GUIDELINES

### I. Introduction

Full, conscious and active participation (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, #14), properly defined, at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass every Sunday, week after week, is the most powerful and most significant means parents have for preparing their child to receive Holy Communion for the first time. As always, good Sunday habits provide the foundation for a vibrant celebration of First Holy Communion.

### II. Remote Preparation

- A. **Parental Involvement.** Parents are the first educators of their children. In addition to their example of practice, parents are exhorted to explicitly instruct their children about the Holy Mass. For example, in considering the two main parts of Holy Mass (The Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist), parents are encouraged to
  - a. discuss with their children the liturgical readings and homily messages that are particularly applicable to the child's life situation.
  - b. teach their children about the sacred action which takes place during the Consecration of the Mass—bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ.
- B. **Sufficient Knowledge and Understanding of the Real Presence.** Children are required to demonstrate sufficient knowledge and understanding about the mystery of the Eucharist and to distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food. Parents and children will be scheduled for an interview meeting with a priest. (*A question and answer instruction sheet is provided at the end of this document for parents and children to review.*)
- C. **Sacramental Confession.** Children may receive their First Communion after they have made sacramental confession. Children should be encouraged to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation frequently, especially before the occasion of their First Communion.
- D. **The Eucharistic Fast.** Appropriate instruction on the Eucharistic fast is to be provided for the children. Generally the fast requires abstinence from food and drink, except water and medicine, for one hour before the reception of the Eucharist. The purpose of fasting is to help focus our attention on the mystery we will celebrate before we even leave our home. It is a sign of special respect for the Eucharist.

- E. **The Manner of Reception.** Children are to be instructed on the two manners of receiving Holy Communion (on the tongue and on the hand). Children should present themselves for Holy Communion with reverence either way they choose.
- F. **“Sunday Best.”** Wearing one’s “Sunday best” allows the children to understand the proper emphasis given to God. In preparation to receive the Holy Eucharist, children should be taught to dress their best at every Sunday Mass.
- G. **Preparation before Holy Mass.** The holiness of the Mass itself and the Gift about to be received requires all to spiritual preparation in an appropriate decorum of prayerful silence. Holy Mass, therefore, does not simply begin at the scheduled time, but much earlier when one arrives beforehand to humbly converse with the Lord.

### III. Proximate Preparation

- A. **Parental Involvement.** First Communion Day is naturally special for a child. Special classes, rehearsals, and often the purchase of new clothes precede the day. Friends and relatives will gather afterwards, often with gifts. A seven- or eight-year old can be overwhelmed and lose focus on the real meaning of the day: the reception of Christ in Holy Communion. Parents are encouraged to keep the child focused on Christ and the gift of Himself to us at every Holy Mass and in the Eucharist, especially by their moderation in decorations and material gifts. As always, good Sunday habits provide the foundation for a vibrant celebration of First Holy Communion.
- B. **First Holy Communion Attire.** All should wear their Sunday best. The wearing of white, especially for girls, can remind the child of the white garment given on the day of Baptism. At the same time, parents should act in moderation, giving special care to avoid excessive attention to clothes and to other decorations. Children are encouraged to wear their First Communion attire on Sunday (the day after) their First Holy Communion so that the greater parish community may celebrate the children’s joy of receiving our Lord.
- C. **Reception of Holy Communion by Adults and Other Children.** There may be some family members or friends who are not Catholic or non-practicing Catholics who will attend First Communion. While hospitality is extended to all who may wish to attend, only Catholics who are in the state of grace (free from serious sin) may receive Holy Communion. This occasion is often a good opportunity to evangelize inactive Catholics by encouraging them to make a good confession and receive God’s mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

### IV. The Liturgy

- A. **Preparation before Holy Mass.** While it is expected that the excitement of the day lends itself to gathering and greeting family and friends in the vestibule, the holiness of the Holy Mass and the Gift about to be received invites all to spiritual preparation by conversing with our Lord in an appropriate decorum of prayerful silence.
- B. **Liturgical responsibilities.** Trained and actively practicing liturgical ministers should be chosen for various roles in the liturgy (extraordinary ministers, lectors, ushers, servers). Adults and young adults should be chosen for these roles. First Communion children may be selected to present the gifts of bread and wine at the Offertory Procession.
- C. **Music.** Music is a central part of all liturgies. The music used at First Communion liturgies should not differ greatly from the music used at a regular Sunday liturgy because First Communion is an initiation, as it were, into weekly participation of the Sunday assembly. The music used on this occasion should also reflect the liturgical season (usually Easter) in which the celebration occurs.
- D. **Reception under One Species.** So that children understand that “Christ, whole and entire, and the true Sacrament, is received even under only one Species,” (*General Instructions of the Roman Missal, #282*) Holy Communion will be distributed under one Species, the Sacred Host on the day of the children’s First Communion.
- E. **Seating.** The children will be seated together in the first pews of the Church, and will come forward together to receive their First Holy Communion. This arrangement allows children to be seated closer to the sanctuary with a clear line of sight and to be focused on the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass with fewer distractions. There will be no reserved seating in the Church, except for the pews in which the children will be seated.
- F. **Manner of Reception.** Children will come forward individually (without parents) to receive their First Holy Communion. After all the children have received, others in attendance who are able to receive Holy Communion will be invited by ushers to come forward. This directive helps children focus on the Real Presence of Christ and also recognizes that some parents may not be able to come forward for Holy Communion. If First Holy Communion takes place on a Saturday, it is important to emphasize with the children that they will be with their parents and families on the following day (Sunday) and every Sunday thereafter as commanded by God and the Church.
- G. **Photography.** Families may take posed pictures after Holy Mass, keeping in mind the respect due to the Blessed Sacrament and avoiding entry into the sanctuary (altar area). Photos and videos may be taken during the entrance or

recessional processions, but not during Holy Mass itself in order that all who are present may be attentive to their participation in the sacred mysteries.

## **THE HOLY EUCHARIST**

### ***What is the Holy Eucharist?***

The Body and Blood of Jesus.

### ***When did Jesus institute the Holy Eucharist? (When was the first Mass?)***

At the Last Supper, the night before Jesus died.

### ***How did Jesus institute the Holy Eucharist?***

Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and said: “This is My Body.”

Jesus took a chalice of wine, blessed it, and said: “This is the Chalice of My Blood.”

### ***How does Jesus give us the Eucharist today?***

Through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, Jesus gives His bishops and priests the power to change bread and wine into His Body and Blood.

### ***What does the word “Eucharist” mean?***

“Thanksgiving.” It is the primary way we give thanks to God through Holy Mass.

### ***Why is the Eucharist called the “Host”?***

Host means “victim” – Jesus was a Victim, the Lamb of God, who died for our sins.

### ***What are the two main parts of the Mass?***

The Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist

### ***What are the different ways in which Jesus is present to us at Holy Mass?***

1. The Most Blessed Sacrament (Holy Eucharist—the highest manner of His Presence)
2. Through His Word (the Scriptures)
3. Through the priest
4. Through the people (“where two or three are gathered, there I am”)

### ***Where is Holy Mass offered?***

On the altar (of sacrifice, which the priest kisses the altar before and after every Holy Mass)

### ***What does the term “Real Presence” mean?***

After the Consecration, Jesus is truly present. It is no longer bread and wine,

but the Body and Blood of Christ. [*More advanced students may know the word “transubstantiation” to describe the change.*]

***Why is it important not to refer to Holy Communion as “bread” or “wine”?***

Because it is the Eucharist, Jesus truly present, not bread and wine, but the Body and Blood of Christ.

***Where is the Eucharist kept after Holy Communion?***

The tabernacle

***How do we know that Christ is present in the tabernacle?***

The sanctuary lamp (candle which is always lit by the tabernacle)

***What is a genuflection?***

Bending one’s knee in adoration of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist or tabernacle.

***What is necessary to receive Holy Communion worthily?***

1. To be free from serious (mortal) sin
2. To keep the Eucharistic fast (abstaining from food and drink, except water, one hour before receiving Holy Communion)

***What is the proper way to receive Holy Communion?***

1. We come forward with hands folded
2. We bow in reverence before receiving (If receiving on the hand, the person places one hand under the other to make a throne for God.)
3. When the priest or deacon (or extraordinary minister) says, “The Body of Christ,” we respond with: “Amen” (and may make the Sign of the Cross after receiving)
4. We spend time in quiet prayer of thanks

***What graces do we receive from Holy Communion?***

1. Union with Christ
2. An increase of [sanctifying] grace (God’s life) and forgiveness of venial sin
3. Promise of eternal life: “He who eats My flesh and drinks My Blood has eternal life.”

***How do we make First Holy Communion a special day?***

We celebrate with family members

We wear our best clothes

We commit to participate at Holy Mass every Sunday and holyday

We visit Jesus in Church and receive Him frequently – First Communion should be the first of many Holy Communion in our lifetime!

***Each child should know the following prayers:***

The Sign of the Cross (and demonstrate the proper way to make)

The Our Father

The Hail Mary

The Glory Be  
An Act of Contrition

*What are some reasons which make it difficult to believe?*

*Are you committed to come to Holy Mass every Sunday and holyday to pray and receive Jesus, as God commands us? Are parents committed to bring you every Sunday and holyday, as they promised on the day of your Baptism?*