

Communion Posture Universal Norm

From the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 3rd edition, March 2002.

The following norm is the universal norm found in the Roman Missal. Note that each Bishop Conference determines the particular norm for its own country. By the general law, each adaptation is then submitted to the Holy See for recognition.

160 The priest then takes the paten or ciborium and goes to the communicants, who, as a rule, approach in a procession.

The faithful are not permitted to take up the consecrated bread or the sacred chalice themselves, and still less hand them on to one another. The faithful may communicate either standing or kneeling, as established by the Conference of Bishops. However, when they communicate standing, it is recommended that they make an appropriate gesture of reverence, to be laid down in the same norms, before receiving the Sacrament.

U.S. Norm

The following adaptation of GIRM 160 was approved by the Holy See for the United States.

160. The priest then takes the paten or ciborium and goes to the communicants, who, as a rule, approach in a procession.

The faithful are not permitted to take the consecrated bread or the sacred chalice by themselves and, still less, to hand them from one to another. The norm for reception of Holy Communion in the dioceses of the United States is standing. Communicants should not be denied Holy Communion because they kneel. Rather, such instances should be addressed pastorally, by providing the faithful with proper catechesis on the reasons for this norm.

When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the Sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister. The consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant. When Holy Communion is received under both kinds, the sign of reverence is also made before receiving the Precious Blood.

Recognized by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 17 April 2002, and, promulgated as particular law of the United States by Decree of the President of the USCCB, Bishop Wilton Gregory, 25 April 2002.

History and Interpretation of the Norm

In the 1967 document *Eucharisticum mysterium* (Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery), the Sacred Congregation of Rites (now called the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments) established that,

34. ... In accordance with the custom of the Church, the faithful may receive communion either kneeling or standing. One or the other practice is to be chosen according to the norms laid down by the conference of bishops.

At the time this directive was issued the US Bishops did not establish a posture, although Communion processions with reception standing quickly became the custom throughout the United States, as they did in much of the world.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (3rd edition) gives the same legislation, stating,

160 ... The faithful may communicate either standing or kneeling, as established by the Conference of Bishops.

Acting upon this provision of the GIRM, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) sought and obtained, in March 2002, a particular norm for the United States.

160. The norm for reception of Holy Communion in the dioceses of the United States is standing. Communicants should not be denied Holy Communion because they kneel. Rather, such instances should be addressed pastorally, by providing the faithful with proper catechesis on the reasons for this norm.

This norm seeks a single posture among communicants. The purpose spoken of in the norm is given earlier in the General Instruction.

42. The gestures and posture of the priest, the deacon, and the ministers, as well as those of the people, ought to contribute to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity, so that the true and full meaning of the different parts of the celebration is evident and that the participation of all is fostered. Therefore, attention should be paid to what is determined by this General Instruction and the traditional practice of the Roman Rite and to what serves the common spiritual good of the People of God, rather than private inclination or arbitrary choice.

A common posture, to be observed by all participants, is a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community gathered for the Sacred Liturgy: it both expresses and fosters the intention and spiritual attitude of the participants.

While the desirability of everyone in the congregation making the common gestures and postures throughout the Mass is clear (a sign of unity), recent interpretations of these norms by the Holy See provides some insight into the mind of the Church. It should be noted that the Holy See alone can authentically interpret legislation it has initiated or approved. The following was issued in response to a dubium of Cardinal George of Chicago. The reference is to the general posture norm, GIRM 43, and whether communicants can kneel down for their thanksgiving after Communion when everyone else is standing, however, it is clear that the mind (mens) of the Holy See on the role of posture is expressed. The general principle enunciated in the response would therefore also apply to GIRM 160, and the issues of kneeling to receive and genuflecting before receiving.

Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments

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Prot. n. 855/03/L

Dubium: In many places, the faithful are accustomed to kneeling or sitting in personal prayer upon returning to their places after individually received Holy Communion during Mass. Is it the intention of the Missale Romanum, editio typica tertia, to forbid this practice?

Responsum: Negative, et ad mentem. The mens is that that the prescription of the Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani, no. 43, is intended, on one hand, to ensure within broad limits a certain uniformity of posture within the congregation for the various parts of the celebration of the Holy Mass, and on the other, to not regulate posture rigidly in such a way that those who wish to kneel or sit would no longer be free.

Francis Cardinal Arinze
Prefect