



ARCHDIOCESE
OF NEW YORK

ON RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* asks each country's conference of bishops to determine the posture to be used for the reception of Communion and the act of reverence to be made by each person as he or she receives. In the United States, the body of bishops has determined that “[t]he norm... is that Holy Communion is to be received standing, unless an individual member of the faithful wishes to receive Communion while kneeling”; and that a bow is the act of reverence made by those receiving ([no. 160](#)). This norm is supported by an Instruction by the Holy See regarding the Eucharist: “In distributing Holy Communion it is to be remembered that ‘sacred ministers may not deny the sacraments to those who seek them in a reasonable manner, are rightly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them’ (Code of Canon Law, can. 843 § 1; cf. can. 915) Therefore, it is not licit to deny Holy Communion to any of Christ's faithful solely on the grounds, for example, that the person wishes to receive the Eucharist kneeling or standing” (*Redemptionis Sacramentum*, no. 91).

The USCCB has decided that standing best promotes the dignity of the liturgy and the unity of the assembly, which is essential. Kneeling was once the common posture for receiving communion, and some people wonder if this is a more reverent way to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. So, while kneeling is a beautiful gesture of reverence for the Eucharist and is perfectly appropriate at other times in the Mass, during Eucharistic adoration or in private prayer, the stated preference is for members of the assembly to stand during the reception of Holy Communion as a sign of their shared unity in the Risen Christ.

Those who receive Communion may do so either in the hand or on the tongue, and the decision should be that of the individual receiving, not of the person distributing Communion or the pastor of the parish. There is nothing intrinsically more reverent about reception on the tongue or less reverent about receiving in the hand. Reverence or irreverence are generally determined by other factors: the spiritual attitude of the recipient, the demeanor of the one giving communion, the adequacy of Eucharistic understanding, and the way the Eucharistic elements are treated both within and outside Mass. What counts most is to be in a state of grace and prepared with fervent desires to be united to Christ. In the final analysis, only God knows how reverent or pious a person truly is, because God looks at the heart and motive, and we usually cannot determine that.