

on here! He is here, the One before whom we fall on our knees! Pay attention! This is not just some social ritual in which we can take part if we want to.” (Light of the World, Ignatius Press, pg. 159).



Kneeling, therefore, allows the body to instruct the soul that something utterly out of the ordinary is taking place, that our relationship to God is not one of equality, that we are not receiving an ‘object’ but the very Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. It lends itself to fostering humility, gratitude and love which should lead to a fruitful reception of Holy Communion.

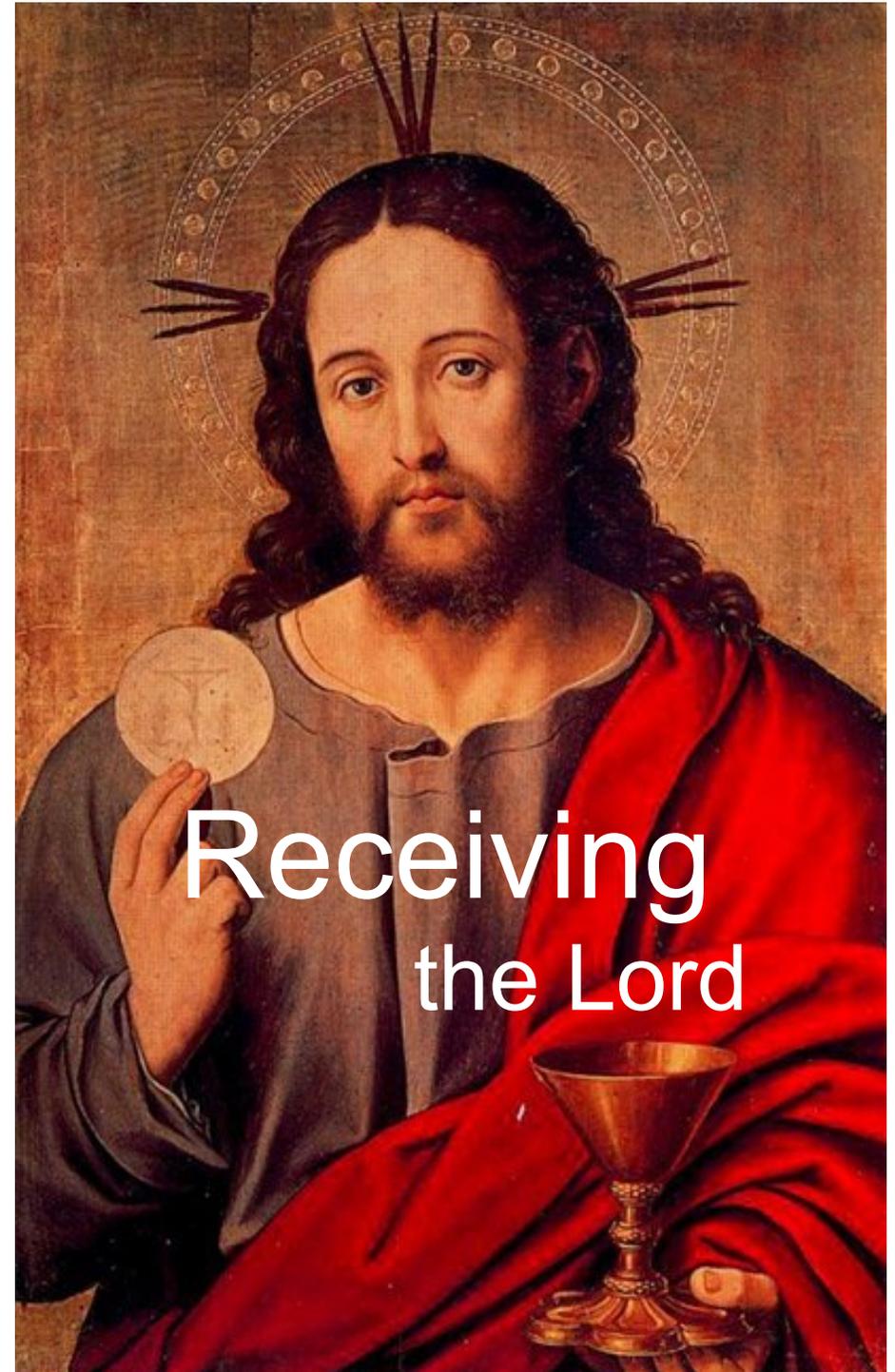
If people kneel at the altar rails or on the sanctuary step, they are also given a little time to recollect their thoughts and prepare their souls in stillness to receive the Lord, rather than focussing on moving forward in a line, where to

put their feet, watching the person in front of them etc. Given that we are not angels and easily distracted, it is much harder to keep focussed on the Lord when in constant movement; especially if a person is also managing a baby or children, or is not so steady on their feet. Even if kneeling is not possible, to be able to line up along the sanctuary step would help to provide a moment of stillness and recollection.

What about receiving Communion standing? Standing can indicate attentiveness and readiness. Not quite as rich as the symbolism of kneeling, and it does not lend itself so well to focussing on Who it is we are about to receive – given our tendency to distraction.

So - the final test must be: which manner of receiving nourishes and protects our faith and is most likely to lead to a fruitful encounter with Our Lord Jesus Christ?

Everything about the way we worship should foster a sense of adoration of God. The way we receive Holy Communion should be especially conducive to awe and wonder since here, God not only comes to meet us, but invites us to union with Himself - a taste of Heaven upon earth.



The intention of this leaflet is simple: to help people receive the Lord Jesus Christ fruitfully in Holy Communion.

What does the Church teach about Holy Communion?

What the Church says in her laws regarding receiving Holy Communion is a consequence of what she teaches Holy Communion to be: the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, together with His soul and Divinity, under the appearance of bread and wine. To put it at its most simple: the Holy Eucharist IS Jesus Christ. When received by the faithful, we call it 'Holy Communion.' Again, it IS Jesus Christ who is received, He whom we worship as our Lord and God.

If we reflect on this truth, it is almost too much to believe – perhaps we would not believe it, unless it had been clearly taught by Jesus Himself:

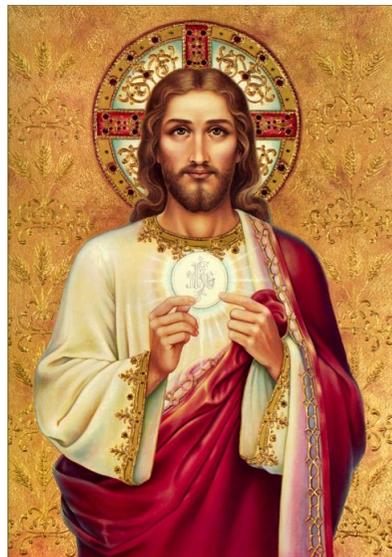
“I am the living bread which has come down from Heaven, the bread which I shall give is my flesh for the life of the world” and “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have life in you.” Jn chapter 6.

It is the Lord’s intention to give Himself to us in this way, so that we may have life in Him.

Once again, if we reflect on this, it would seem first that we are invited to *believe*, by faith, that this is true.

Preparing for Holy Communion

Secondly, we must think and decide how we are going to approach receiving Holy Communion, this encounter with Jesus, our Living God. So great a matter surely requires conscious thought and a reasoned decision as befits a rational being. What would our aims be in this thought process? - to do whatever best expresses our Catholic faith regarding the Holy Eucharist, and indeed whatever



beautiful and worthy idea. Its value is somewhat diminished, though, when the person immediately removes the Lord from this throne to place the Host in his/her mouth.

Receiving Holy Communion kneeling or standing.

Let us now consider the option of receiving Holy Communion either kneeling or standing. All the factors we bore in mind regarding receiving on the tongue or in the hand can be re-applied here. Perhaps one other truth is also relevant: we are not angels, but human beings damaged by sin. Angels are always completely focussed on God – they do not suffer from distraction as we often do.



Given that we are not God, are not equal to Him, a gesture of humility would seem appropriate when before Him – this is not

incompatible with our love for God or His love for us. Kneeling, whereby we make ourselves smaller expresses this truth well. The words of the greatest of all prophets and the Lord’s cousin come to mind: *“He must grow greater, I must grow less.”* Pope Benedict, as Cardinal Ratzinger wrote:

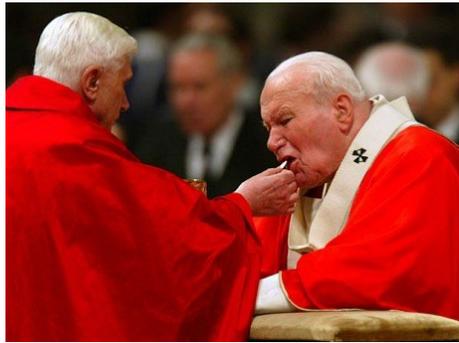
“Communion used to be received kneeling, which made perfectly good sense. The attitude of kneeling ought never to be allowed to disappear from the Church. It is the most impressive physical expression of Christian piety, by which, on one hand, we remain upright, looking out, gazing upon Him, but, on the other, we nonetheless bow down.” (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *“God and the World,”* - Ignatius Press)

In a recent interview, Pope Benedict said on this subject:

“The idea behind my current practice of having people kneel to receive communion on the tongue was to send a signal and to underscore the real presence with an exclamation point. One very important reason is that there is a great danger of superficiality... I wanted to send a clear signal: Something quite special is going

unfortunately. When we receive Jesus Christ in Holy Communion, we should almost be in perpetual shock at the idea that God should come to us, humble Himself in this way for our sake. If we receive Holy Communion frequently, the danger of over-familiarity is ever present: we should adopt the manner of receiving which minimises this danger, and which reinforces our faith.

If our manner of receiving Holy Communion is not sufficiently ‘different’ from our everyday activities, if it does not ‘jolt’ us into realising something special and out of the ordinary is happening, then the likelihood of over-familiarity increases. And as that increases, the fruitfulness of our Holy Communion decreases.



In summary, receiving on the tongue conveys the meaning that we are being fed by Someone Else, that this is not ordinary everyday food, that we are dependent beings. It is simple and reverent. Receiving in the hand does not convey the same strength of meaning, though it may be conducted reverently. It may therefore require greater effort to maintain due reverence to make up for this lack. Pastoral experience also suggests that there is more scope for things going wrong, or abuses, when receiving in the hand such as: dirty hands, treating the sacred Host like popcorn, walking off without consuming the Host, attempting to receive with only one hand, attempting to ‘grab’ the Host from the priest etc. There is indeed a unique symbolism, when receiving in the hand, of making the hand into a throne to receive Our Lord and King which is a

reinforces it. Further, if receiving the Lord is to bear fruit within us, we would need to be conscious of Who we are going to receive and try to have the right “attitude of heart” or dispositions. This is not an exhaustive list, but to approach Jesus with love, gratitude, humility and awe would seem obvious.

No one is ‘worthy’ to receive Holy Communion, to receive God. Nonetheless, it is part and parcel of the plan and will of God that we *should* receive Him in this way, a way specifically designed for the human being, who is a union of physical body and spiritual soul.

Receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation

On our part, unworthy though we are, we must ensure that our soul is at least free from serious sin before receiving Him in Holy Communion; in other words, a person must be *reconciled to God first*, through Confession, before taking Him into themselves.

Back to our reflection on how to approach receiving Holy Communion. The following factors may help the reasoning process and decision.

We can bear in mind:

- The Holy Eucharist is Jesus Christ our God, as He is now in Heaven,
- Thus, the Holy Eucharist is in fact a Living Person, not a ‘thing’ or an object,
- We are not God – the relationship is therefore not one of equality.
- Faith can be weakened or lost if not nourished and protected.
- Symbolism, gesture, posture and ritual convey *meaning* to human beings, enabling the body to “instruct the soul.”

The Church is concerned to ensure due respect towards the Holy Eucharist and to safeguard people’s faith, so she has formulated laws designed to do this. This also applies to the reception of Holy Communion, and so we have:

After the priest says ‘The Body of Christ,’ “*The communicant replies: Amen, and receives the Sacrament either on the tongue or, where this is allowed and if the communicant so chooses, in the hand. As soon as the communicant*



receives the host, he or she consumes it entirely.” The General Instruction of the Roman Missal – April 2005, no. 161.

In 2011, the following statement was inserted into the General Instruction by the Bishops of England & Wales:

"In the Dioceses of England and Wales Holy Communion is to be received standing, though individual members of the faithful may choose to receive Communion while kneeling. However, when they communicate standing, it is recommended that the faithful bow in reverence before receiving the sacrament."

This addition acknowledges that in the majority of parishes, the norm is to receive Communion standing, but also explicitly recognises the right of people to kneel to receive. If they do not kneel, the norm is concerned to ensure some act of reverence is made before reception, namely a bow.

Finally, in another recent document we read:

Although each of the faithful always has the right to receive Holy Communion on the tongue, at his choice, if any communicant

should wish to receive the Sacrament in the hand, in areas where the Bishops' Conference with the recognition of the Apostolic See has given permission, the sacred host is consumed by the communicant in the presence of the minister, so that no one goes away carrying the [host] in his hand. If there is a risk of profanation, then Holy Communion should not be given in the hand to the faithful." Instruction: *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, March 2004, no.92.

Thus, Holy Communion cannot be received just any old way. The options provided by the Church are these; to receive kneeling or standing, and to receive directly on the tongue or in the hand. Bearing in mind the factors stated earlier, let us reflect on these



options.

Receiving on the Tongue

Firstly, let us consider the options of receiving on the tongue, or in the hand. Most of us cannot remember being fed as a baby by our parents – feeding ourselves is the norm for us. We get our food and we feed ourselves. What happens at Holy Communion? God is giving Himself to us as our food – perhaps we should write ‘Food’ because this is not ordinary food at all. Ordinary food becomes part of us, but this Food which God gives us makes us become part of Him! The way we receive therefore should express the fact that we are *being fed* and that this is not an ‘ordinary’ feeding activity for us. Receiving on the tongue from the hand of another [the priest] would convey those meanings well to us.

Would receiving in the hand also convey them? Not as clearly, as there is still an element of ‘feeding ourselves,’ and we also tend to put out our hands to receive objects all the time – it’s nothing special.

It is healthy for us to acknowledge that we are not God, but created beings, and that we depend on God for life, for everything. We are not self-sufficient beings –



only God is self-sufficient.

A child is utterly dependent on its parents for food; a sick person depends on others to provide nourishment. Is it not also true that we are God’s children, and that we are beings in need of healing? We must rely on God to provide for our needs. We are all wounded by the effects of sin, and so we can be led to think we are in control of everything, that we are able to manage everything by ourselves, which is not true. If we receive on the tongue, it conveys the meaning that we are not self-sufficient – we depend on another, we do not control our lives, even that we are helpless without God. These meanings are present if we receive in the hand but here too, the symbolism is weaker as there is more of a control element on our part.

Is it possible for us to become over-familiar with things, or people or activities? Without doubt. Can this even happen with sacred things? This is also true,