

Faithfulness In Liturgical Matters

The Gospel Reading from St. Matthew reminds us of the value in being a faithful servant ... being faithful in small things leads to faithfulness in large things and great reward in heaven! So a few points for consideration about faithfulness in Liturgical matters in the Mass:

PROPERLY RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION:

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal states that the faithful 'may receive either on the tongue or in the hand.' (GIRM, 160) If the faithful receive on the hand, then consideration should be given to the following:

1. Communion in the hand should show as much reverence and due respect for the Real Presence of Christ as kneeling to receive on the tongue.
2. The faithful should receive with two hands placing one hand under the other. (If you are right handed, place right hand under left.)
3. The faithful must respond "Amen" in response to the formula of the minister, "The Body of Christ."
4. The faithful who have received the Eucharist in the hand should step to the side and consume the Host in the presence/sight of the priest before returning to their pew to pray.

In the United States the norm is to receive Holy Communion while standing. The Bishop of the Diocese of Lincoln has stated that "communicants at Mass may kneel while receiving Holy Communion in the Diocese of Lincoln." (Pastoral Bulletin 9-24-2002)

STAYING FOR THE ENTIRE MASS:

It is a good and pious practice to stay until the conclusion of the Mass – that is until after the closing hymn has been concluded and the parishioner has offered a prayerful act of thanksgiving. A few considerations:

1. Departing immediately after receiving Holy Communion is inappropriate without a serious and important reason. The period for meditation, the closing prayer, the final blessing and dismissal, the closing hymn and the recessional all have significant purpose and value in the liturgy. Departing before or during any of these perhaps demonstrates an improper understanding of what is truly occurring at the Mass.
2. Jesus is clear in Scripture about the need for gratitude. (Luke 17:17) Staying until the conclusion of Mass and then kneeling in silent grateful prayer for a few moments is highly commendable.
3. Remember that the first person to leave Mass early was Judas – "so he took the morsel and left at once." (John 13:30)

PROPER ATTIRE FOR SUNDAY MASS:

Preparation for participating in the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass begins before even leaving our homes. Planning our attire is an important consideration – and this is not simply an admonishment about modesty in dress. No one desires our Lord to ask them, "My friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?" (Matthew 22:12) It is true that our Lord desires internal conversion more than external conversion, but really the Lord desires both! The fact remains that our external dress can reveal our internal dispositions. It is true that to a new Christian, the Lord is less concerned about attire and more desirous of a soul coming to worship, however a mature Christian should have an interior desire to give their very best to the Lord – interiorly and exteriorly. "Wearing our Sunday best" is one way in which we demonstrate the importance and value of the Lord's Day of worship.

VALUING SILENCE IN THE CHURCH:

Pope Benedict reminds us that, "Silence is a part of the liturgy." (Spirit of the Liturgy, 209) The prophet Elijah encountered the Lord in "a light silent sound." (1 Kings 19:12) Conversations among the parish family are highly encouraged as they serve to build community, but they should be held in the Vestibule, downstairs, or outside. The significance of large doors entering the Nave remind us that we are entering God's house which Jesus reminds us is to be 'a House of Prayer.' (Matthew 21:13) In addition to blocking the silent voice of God calling out to us, conversations also serve to distract and interrupt others who are in prayerful conversation with God.

ACTIVELY PARTICIPATING IN THE MASS:

"A more conscious, active and fruitful participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar" (*Redemptionis Sacramentum*) not only includes vocally singing, vocally responding to the prayers, physically kneeling and standing at the appropriate times, but principally is an interior concentration on the readings and the prayers of the Mass. It includes gently pushing away mental distractions so as to focus on the work of the Holy Spirit which is transformational on the gifts presented at the altar and on those who receive them.