

WHO IS ADMITTED TO HOLY COMMUNION?

In the Catholic Church, Holy Eucharist is integral to the Mass. The Holy Eucharist may only be consecrated at Mass and the Mass is never celebrated without Holy Eucharist. To receive Holy Communion at Mass, persons must be in communion with the Catholic Church and free from mortal sin. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has stated it in this way:

For Catholics

As Catholics, we fully participate in the celebration of the Eucharist when we receive Holy Communion. We are encouraged to receive Communion devoutly and frequently. In order to be properly disposed to receive Communion, participants should not be conscious of grave sin and normally should have fasted for one hour. A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord without prior sacramental confession except for a grave reason where there is not opportunity for confession. In this case, the person is to be mindful of the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, including the intention of confessing as soon as possible (canon 916). A frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance is encouraged for all.

For our fellow Christians

We welcome our fellow Christians to the celebration of the Eucharist as our brothers and sisters. We pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit in this Eucharist will draw us closer to one another and begin to dispel the sad divisions which separate us. We pray that these will lessen and finally disappear, in keeping with Christ's prayer for us "that they may all be one" (Jn 17:21).

Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of Faith, life, and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to Holy Communion. Eucharistic sharing in exceptional circumstances by other Christians requires permission according to the directives of the diocesan bishop and the provisions of canon law (canon 844 ss 4). Members of the Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Polish National Catholic Church are urged to respect the discipline of their own Churches. According to Roman Catholic discipline, the Code of Canon Law does not object to the reception of communion by Christians of these Churches (canon 844 ss 3).

For those not receiving Holy Communion

All who are not receiving Holy Communion are encouraged to express in their hearts a prayerful desire to unity with the Lord Jesus and with one another.

For non-Christians

*We also welcome to this celebration those who do not share our Faith in Jesus Christ. While we cannot admit them to Holy Communion, we ask them to offer their prayers for the peace and the unity of the human family. **USCCB***

These norms, as they apply to our Good Shepherd Catholic Community, may be summarized as follows:

- There is not a grave reason to substitute an act of perfect contrition for the confession of sin in order to receive Holy Communion since opportunities are provided weekly for the confession of sin in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Anyone not in full communion with the Catholic Church may not be admitted to Holy Communion since our Catholic Bishops have not permitted this exception for inter-communion with our fellow Christians.
- Those who are not admitted to Holy Communion are Catholics not properly disposed because of grave sin, Catholics married without the Sacrament of Matrimony, fellow Christians from other denominations because they are not in full communion with us, and all non-Christians because they do not share our faith in Jesus Christ.

The Eucharist is most sacred. In our Catholic Tradition, not everyone is admitted to Holy Communion. We all experience the sad divisions which separate us and which Jesus himself expressed to his disciples at the Last Supper. His prayer “that they may all be one” is also our prayer. We welcome our brothers and sisters to join us for the celebration of the Paschal Mystery. And, we join with them in the prayerful desire that the Eucharist may one day be the sign of full unity of shared faith with all churches. At Mass, we invite Catholics unable to receive Eucharist and those persons from other faith traditions to come forward to receive a blessing instead of Communion. We thank everyone for respecting our Catholic Tradition.

We Catholics are proud of our Sacred Tradition that is based on Sacred Scripture. In Chapter 6 of the Gospel according to John, we hear Jesus saying “I am the Bread of Life” (v. 35, also v. 48). In response we hear that “The Jews murmured about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven” (v. 41). Jesus explains further “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world” (v. 51). In response we hear that some Jews quarreled among themselves, saying “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (v. 52). In his final word, Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For, my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him” (vs. 53-56). Upon hearing Jesus’ final word on the Eucharist, many of his own disciples said, “This saying is hard; who can accept it?” (v. 60). Saint John adds “As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him” (v. 66). To this day many disciples of Jesus are unable to follow his teaching on the Eucharist. To this day Eucharist is still the clearest dividing line between Catholics and other Christian disciples of Jesus. As Catholics we ought never to be ashamed to proclaim clearly and without compromise the truth of Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture on the Eucharist before we receive Holy Communion. We are proud to accompany Jesus and remain in him, faithful to his teaching on the Eucharist. Therefore, we will continue to invite all people into our assembly for Mass and continue to proclaim to ourselves and to others what we believe.