

The Ministers of Communion

Liturgy with Style and Grace

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The acolyte's ministry has to do with helping. Those who take on this particular part of the ministry, for Holy Communion, are helping the whole community. Primarily, they make it possible for the communion rite to take place in a length of time that is not out of proportion to the whole liturgy. This is not a matter of efficiency, but a recognition that the meaning of the Holy Communion cannot be separated from its experience in the ritual. When "going to communion" takes a long time, and so the eating and drinking *together* is not experienced, then the communion rite loses its associate with the Eucharistic prayer and the breaking of the bread. The number of ministers of communion needed, therefore, is determined by the number of communicants at a Mass...

Those selected for this ministry should have, or soon acquire, that grace in movement and reverence in touch which are to characterize all who minister before the assembly. Reverence in touch is especially important for ministers of communion since their whole work is to take in hand the vessels of bread and of wine and to share them with everyone. A true reverence for what they carry is to be seen and felt by all: not a false humility, but a strong sense of joy and delight in the sharing of the Lord's body and blood. That can translate to how the ciborium is picked up and carried or how the minister stands...

Most of all, the minister of communion must be a person who can put reverence into practice when giving the bread and cup to others. "The moment of communion is one that should be seized by both the minister and the communicant. ... This is one moment when attention should be individual and total. The minister says the words of the formula *to* the person (not to the air). ... In placing the holy bread on the palm of the communicant's hand, the minister will touch the hand. And the same will be true of the ministry of the cup. *Eye contact, direct address, touching!* All are a communion of persons in the Lord. ... This means that there can be no rush. One can minister communion with reverence and dignity and personal attention and still keep the procession moving steadily. But it cannot be done in haste, or with absent-mindedness, or with frantic searchings of the approaching processional lines." (*It Is Your Own Mystery.*)

Those who are to take this ministry must, above all else, be individuals who know how to be truly present to others in the moment they have. They are not dispensing machines, but brothers and sisters in this very body and blood they are sharing. They not only speak their own faith in saying "The body of Christ," but they call forth the faith of the communicant.

Reflections

"Eye contact, direct address and touching" are part of the experience of sharing. At what sharing times in your life is this true? Think about homecomings, farewells, times of forgiveness, times of tragedy. Can the sharing of bread and cup be anything less than an intimate moment?

By his or her eyes, smile, and gentle serving of bread and cup, the minister of communion tells us this in a very special event. The minister can make us feel good to be present at this feast, can remind us that our communion with the Lord is also communion with one another.

Do you sense any difference in receiving communion from one minister to another? Describe a good minister of communion.