

*Collegeville Ministry Series*

# THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNION

Third Edition

Michael Kwatera, OSB



LITURGICAL PRESS

Collegeville, Minnesota

[www.litpress.org](http://www.litpress.org)

Photos by W. P. Wittman Photography Limited.

“To Be Your Bread,” © 1981, 1982, David Haas. Published by OCP. 5536 Hassalo, Portland, OR 97213. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

Excerpts from documents of the Second Vatican Council are from *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, OP, © 1996. Used with permission of Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.

Scripture texts used in this work are taken from the *New American Bible, revised edition* © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, DC and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All rights reserved. No part of the *New American Bible* may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Excerpts from the English translation of *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* © 2007, International Commission on English in the Liturgy Corporation (ICEL). Excerpts from the English translation of *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass* © 1974, ICEL. All rights reserved.

© 2016 by the Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, microfilm, microfiche, mechanical recording, photocopying, translation, or by any other means, known or yet unknown, for any purpose except brief quotations in reviews, without the previous written permission of the Liturgical Press, Saint John’s Abbey, P.O. Box 7500, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

---

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015950490

ISBN: 978-0-8146-4873-5    978-0-8146-4898-8 (ebook)

*Dedicated to  
the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion  
who serve the church  
in the Diocese of St. Cloud, Minnesota*



# Contents

Preface vii

1 Being and Giving the Body of Christ:  
A Life of Ministry 1

2 Being and Giving the Body of Christ:  
Practical Suggestions 7

Ministry of Communion  
within the Assembly 9

*Sharing the Bread* 14

*Sharing the Cup* 16

Ministry of Communion  
to the Sick and Homebound 22

3 Lay-Led Communion Services 27

4 Looking for the Perfect Eucharistic Minister 35

Notes 41

Act of Personal Recommitment  
for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion 45



## Preface

This booklet is offered to people who are known as “extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion.” These persons have become an indispensable part of the ministry of Communion in parishes, hospitals, and religious communities.

You have accepted a share in this ministry. No matter where you exercise it, you are not a Communion *distributor* (a distributor is part of an automobile engine’s electrical system or a person in marketing). You are a *minister* of Communion, a title that clearly identifies you as one who serves God’s holy people.

Pope Paul VI explained the need for your service in his Instruction on Facilitating Sacramental Eucharistic Communion in Particular Circumstances (1973), where he described how a lack of sufficient clergy for the sharing of Communion could occur:

During Mass, because of the size of the congregation or a particular difficulty in which a celebrant finds himself; outside of Mass, when it is difficult because of distance to take the sacred species, especially in the Viaticum, to the sick in danger of death, or when the very number of the sick, especially in hospitals and similar institutions, requires many ministers.<sup>1</sup>

With these circumstances in mind, Paul VI authorized extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to share the Body and Blood of Christ with their fellow worshipers in the assembly and with those confined to their homes, so that no one “be deprived of this sacramental help and consolation.”<sup>2</sup>

The exhortations of Pope Pius X for frequent and early Communion (1905, 1910) have resulted in an unprecedented number of Catholics receiving Communion at each Mass. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion render valuable service in places where “the number of faithful requesting Holy Communion is such that the celebration of Mass or the distribution of the Eucharist outside of Mass would be unduly prolonged.”<sup>3</sup> As an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, you help ensure that the Communion rite of the eucharistic celebration, important though it be, not be disproportionately long in relation to the other parts. Your ministry also enables a congregation to share in Communion services when a priest cannot be present for the celebration of the Eucharist.

In the past, the scarcity of priests, deacons, and acolytes may have caused the sick and those confined to their homes to be deprived of the Eucharist for long periods of time. Now, through your ministry, they are able to receive their saving Lord in Communion more frequently.

In 1978 the bishops of the United States voted to extend permission for the congregation to receive both the bread and the wine at Sunday and holy day Masses. This welcome practice has increased the need for extraordinary ministers in the sharing of Communion, and it will continue to do so. It is probable that in the United States, at the present time, more Sunday communicants receive the Eucharist from the hands of extraordinary ministers than from clergy. The desirable and significant role of laypersons in the ministry of Communion is here to stay.

Your ministry complements and extends the ministry of the clergy. Yet your ministry is not only that of “official assistant” to the clergy; it is a particular way of exercising your baptismal priesthood. You are among your fellow worshipers as one who serves; you cannot lose sight of your oneness with them, nor of your oneness with the priest celebrant as he serves the assembly in its worship. You also have a ministry to your fellow liturgical ministers: you are to share with them the joy and strength your service brings to you and so build them up in love. It is my hope



that this booklet will deepen your joy and renew your strength in the ministry of Communion, and I share in Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's prayerful request to you: "I ask everyone, especially ordained ministers and those who, after adequate preparation and in cases of genuine need, are distributing the Eucharist to make every effort to ensure that this simple act preserves its importance as a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus in the sacrament" (*Sacramentum Caritatis* 50).

My use of the term "bread" for the Body of Christ in this booklet is one with St. Paul's in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 11:23-29), where "bread" and "cup" refer to the Body and Blood of Christ. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). Thus Paul affirmed the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and so do I. The "bread" we share in the Eucharist is not ordinary bread, but rather "the bread that comes down from heaven," the "living bread" (John 6:50, 51), Jesus Christ.

My comments and suggestions draw upon the excellent work in *Touchstones for Liturgical Ministers*, published jointly by The Liturgical Conference and The Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (1978).

Michael Kwatera, OSB

Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

June 22, 2014



# 1

## Being and Giving the Body of Christ

### A Life of Ministry

*For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. (Rom 12:4-5)*

We easily think of the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist as something holy, as something filled with God's life—and rightly so. The Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Yet, in the Eucharist, God the Father likes to start with something that comes from us—with something *human*. God the Father starts with human food—bread and wine—and lets them become the Body and Blood of God's Son through the power of the Holy Spirit. God the Father lets us start with our bread—a symbol of all that nourishes our human life—and with our wine—a symbol of all that gladdens and saddens our human life—and lets us share the joys and sorrows of his Son as we eat and drink in his memory. The bread and wine that we place on the altar—human gifts of little material value—must be transformed by the Spirit of God to become the Body and Blood of Christ. Then we receive back our poor, human gifts as the richest gift of God's love: God's beloved Son.

## 2 *The Ministry of Communion*

In the Eucharist, God the Father starts with the *human*—the bread and wine on the altar, and the bread and wine of *our human lives*—and brings out the *beyond-the-human*, the *divine*, in them. Bread and wine, the work of human hands, become the Body and Blood of Christ. But the change doesn't end there: by sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ, *we become what we receive!* St. Augustine, the fifth-century bishop of Hippo in North Africa, preached about this marvel often, and had a yearly opportunity to explain it to those newly baptized at Easter: “Because He [the Lord] suffered for us, He left us in this Sacrament His Body and Blood, which He made even as He made us, also. For we have become His Body, and through His mercy we are what we receive.”<sup>1</sup> To become a member of the Body of Christ through baptism is to take one's place in the intimate circle of God's worshipers, the family circle that we glimpse in an imaginary letter of St. Luke in Roger Lloyd's *The Letters of Luke the Physician*. Luke is describing a celebration of the Eucharist to a curious friend of his:



You would look round casually at the worshippers, and they would seem to you very, very ordinary, and even mediocre. But all that would be because you were looking at it critically from the outside. No one can understand what it means to us unless he is himself part and parcel of it, standing on the inside of the circle, and sharing in the deep experience of worshipping our Lord Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

Like St. Luke and St. Paul, St. Augustine believed that our sharing in the Eucharist changes us. Augustine repeated this belief often, lest his congregation forget that their sharing in the Body of Christ really formed them *into* the Body of Christ. “Behold what you have received!” he told them. “Therefore, just as you see that the bread which was made is one mass, so may you also be one Body by loving one another, by having one faith, one hope, and an undivided charity.”<sup>3</sup> Such is the great dignity and responsibility of us who share in the Body and Blood of Christ: our lives are to affirm that the Body of Christ is one in faith, hope, and love, even though it has many members. And just in case there might be some people in Augustine’s congregation who still hadn’t got the point, he made a declaration that may startle us by its simple truthfulness: “There you are on the table, and there you are in the chalice.”<sup>4</sup> We, though many, are members of the one Body of Christ; we are one with Christ our Head in the Eucharist. Through our human gifts of bread and wine and our very lives, and through the divine gift of the Father’s beloved Son, we become what we receive in the Eucharist: the Body of Christ. This marvelous transformation is what the author of the song “To Be Your Bread” invites us to ask for humbly: “To be Your bread now, be Your wine now, Lord, come and change us, to be a Sign of Your love. Blest and broken, poured and flowing, gift that You gave us, to be Your body once again.”<sup>5</sup>

For extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, there is another dignity and responsibility: you must become what you *give*. You must *become* and *live* as the Body of Christ that you give to your brothers and sisters. In you, as in the bread and

#### 4 *The Ministry of Communion*

wine of the Eucharist, God the Father starts with the *human* and brings out the *beyond-the-human*. God the Father gives you a share in a ministry that humans could not deserve and would not dare to ask for on their own. Your call to serve is as unexpected and as undeserved as the young boy's at the multiplication of the loaves and fishes (John 6:1-15). When Jesus wanted to feed the large, hungry crowd of his hearers, he didn't ask the Father to create loaves and fishes out of thin air. He could have, but he didn't. Jesus began this great miracle with loaves and fishes provided by a young boy. How happy and surprised that boy must have felt in knowing that Jesus had chosen to use his loaves and fishes in so great a miracle! The boy and the crowd that shared his lunch realized that God likes to start with the human when acting for and with human beings. God starts with the *human*—with *us*—to lead us beyond human possibilities. That is what Jesus did for the hungry crowd on the hillside in Galilee; that is what Jesus does for those of us who accept God's call to ministry and for those we serve.

Through your humble service as a minister of Communion, God unites you to your fellow members of the Body of Christ and actually forms all of you into that Body. But God doesn't do this without the *human*; God loves the human too much to ignore it. An extraordinary minister's human, personal, interior qualities will either build up or tear down the Body of Christ, that temple for God in the Spirit made up of brothers and sisters in Christ. The Order for the Commissioning of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion contains words that are worth recalling often: "In this ministry, you must be examples of Christian living in faith and conduct; you must strive to grow in holiness through this sacrament of unity and love. Remember that, though many, we are one body because we share the one bread and one cup."<sup>6</sup>

There must be an essential unity between your life inside and outside the liturgy, as the liturgical scholar Aidan Kavanagh states: "The common end for which the diverse liturgical ministries work is not a ceremony but a corporate life in faithful

communion with all God's holy people and holy things. For this reason liturgical ministers should never be seen to do in the liturgy what they are not regularly seen to do outside the liturgy."<sup>7</sup>

To put this another way: your service as ministers inside the liturgy should only make visible the faith and love you are seen to manifest outside the liturgy. Generous self-giving, conformed to the pattern of Christ's self-giving unto death, must mark both your interior and exterior life, both inside and outside the liturgy. St. Augustine exhorted his hearers to such self-giving while praising St. Lawrence, deacon and martyr, who had ministered the chalice of the Lord's Blood: "Just as he had partaken of a gift of self at the table of the Lord, so he prepared to offer such a gift. In his life he loved Christ; in his death he followed in his footsteps."<sup>8</sup> Similarly, your love for Christ present in the Eucharist and in his people will make the bread and wine you minister to others genuine signs of Christ's self-sacrifice and *your own*. The bread and wine that you minister to others will be outward signs of the love that flows from the heart of Christ and from your own heart.

"If, then, you want to understand the body of Christ," says St. Augustine, "remember what the Apostle says: 'You are the body of Christ and members thereof' (1 Cor 12:27). If, then, you are the body of Christ and his members, it is your mystery which is set forth on the Lord's table; it is your own mystery that you receive. . . . You say 'Amen' to what you are, and in saying 'Amen' you subscribe to it. For you hear the words 'The body of Christ,' and you answer 'Amen.' Be members of the body of Christ, then, so that your 'Amen' might be authentic."<sup>9</sup> As extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, you join with your brothers and sisters to say "Amen" to Christ as you receive him in the Eucharist; you also lead your brothers and sisters, through their "Amen," to make a personal act of faith in the Christ who is present in the Eucharist and in themselves. Let your "Amen" to being a member of the Body of Christ be true, so that you can help make others' "Amen" to being members of the Body of Christ also be true. The bishops of the United

## 6 *The Ministry of Communion*

States call for this true “Amen” in their statement *Christian Commitment*: the liturgical ministries, “as special ways of living out the baptismal life of faith . . . demand a renewal of faith in view of the new charge given by the community to the individual. These moments of personal dedication demand reflection, prayer, and discernment so that the decisions to be made may be truly responsive to God’s call.”<sup>10</sup>

Such reflection, prayer, and discernment are not one-time-only nourishment, but a necessary diet for sustaining a life of generous service to God’s people, both inside and outside the liturgy. Your life as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion must be one of both *being* and *giving* the Body of Christ. Let your “Amen” to that life of service be real and complete. Then you will find great joy in the Lord who chooses to be present in you, in those you serve, and in the Eucharist that forms you into his Body.