

## Reception of Holy Communion at Mass

Most of us understand the Church's teaching regarding preparation for sharing in Holy Communion. We remember that we are to fast from solid food for one hour prior to receiving Holy Eucharist to ready ourselves to be fed. We also understand that we must be united with Christ and his Church to receive Holy Eucharist. This means that we must be baptized into the Catholic Church and not be in a state of serious sin. Those conscious of serious sin should seek the sacrament of Reconciliation to prepare worthily for Holy Communion.

Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, in his pastoral letter Guide to the Assembly, puts it well: "Before coming forward we say, 'Lord, I am not worthy.' We are never worthy of this table, for it is God's grace and gift. Yet we do come forward. This is food for the journey that we began at baptism. We may eat of it when we are tired, when we are discouraged, even when we have failed. But not when we have forgotten the church, forgotten the way we began at the font; not when we have abandoned our struggle against evil and remain unrepentant for having done so. Let us examine our lives honestly each time before approaching the Eucharist. Worthy, none of us ever is, but properly prepared each one must be. Christ, present in the Eucharist and in us, calls us to be a holy communion, to grow in love and holiness for one another's sake."

When we come forward to share the Holy Eucharist, we come in procession, as the Body of Christ. We come as a pilgrim Church, the body of those who believe in Christ, on their way to the heavenly Jerusalem. In fact, each time we move forward together to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord, we join the countless number of all the baptized who have gone before us, our loved ones, saints throughout the ages, pilgrims and believers all.

The singing of the Communion song supports us in our unity in Christ. For some, however, the singing of this song is perceived as an intrusion on their own prayer. In fact, however, this song is prayer, the corporate thanksgiving prayer of the members of the Body of Christ united with one another in the Lord. Over and over again the prayers of the liturgy and the norms of the GIRM emphasize this fundamental theology of the unity of the baptized, stressing that when we come together to participate in the Eucharistic celebration we come, not as individuals, but as united members of Christ's body.

It may be difficult for some of us to embrace this emphasis on Mass as the action of a community rather than an individual act of my own faith and piety, but it is important that we make every effort to do so. This may be part of the self-sacrifice to which some of us are called. At liturgy we sacrifice our individual preferences for the good of the whole community which is the Church.