



Catechesis on Blessings during Holy Communion

The Eucharist is an act of Christ and of the Church through the Holy Spirit, and our communal celebration of the Eucharist is a sign and source of our unity in faith, worship, and life. Partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ during Holy Communion expresses our unity as a Church and builds up the Church.

The Eucharist pertains to the whole body of the Church gathered in response to God's invitation. The Eucharist concerns individual members of the Church in different ways because some have been called by God to be lay persons, others to be consecrated religious, and still others to be ordained clergy. Lay persons and religious have their proper roles in liturgy, and indeed all the faithful are called to full, conscious, and active participation. For the ordained, the traditional role of the Deacon in Mass is to assist the Priest or Bishop, and the Priest or Bishop presides over the liturgy such that certain prayers (such as blessings) are reserved to him. Therefore, liturgy as an act of the Church gathered according to God's call indicates that the act of blessing during the Mass is proper to the presiding Priest or Bishop.*

The reception of Communion, which is the consummation of the Mass, is part of the entire movement of the Eucharistic celebration. At God's invitation, we come together as the People of God: lay, religious, and ordained. We listen and respond to the Word of God; Christ himself teaches us, challenges us, and urges us to fidelity. We present bread and wine to our Creator, and we raise up a great prayer of thanksgiving. In Communion, we receive "the bread of heaven" and "cup of salvation" — Christ, who offered Himself "for the life of the world" (Jn 6:51). After Communion, we are sent forth with divine blessing to live what we have celebrated, for we are to live the Eucharist in all that we do. Within this liturgical flow, Communion is the time to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Within this flow, the liturgical blessing of those present finds its proper place when, after Communion, the Priest or Bishop blesses each and all by making the Sign of the Cross and praying, "May almighty God bless you, ✠ the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

✠ The Diocese of Arlington's *Norms for the Celebration of the Eucharist* treats blessings during Communion.[†] The *Norms* discourages clergy from giving blessings during Communion because liturgical blessings within Mass are properly an act of the Priest or Bishop and because the proper place of blessing individuals present at Mass is the final blessing. The *Norms* prohibits lay persons from blessing within Mass because liturgical blessings are reserved to ordained ministers whenever they are present.* The *Norms* also discourages gestures that could be confused with blessings, especially the laying on of hands, which has its own sacramental significance. ✠

Instead of blessing during Communion, ministers may say, "May we be united in God," "May we be one in God,"[†] or indicate that a blessing is given at the end of the Mass. For children who have not yet received Holy Communion, we can offer ongoing catechesis about God's blessings and the Church's role in them. With our fellow Christians, we pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit will draw us closer to one another and dispel the sad divisions that separate us. Finally, all Christians—brothers and sisters in Christ by our common baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit—are invited to reflect on the significance and power of the final blessing, given in the name of the Holy Trinity to each and to all present so that we may live more fully as Christ's disciples.

*Cf. *Ecclesia de Mysterio*, art. 6 § 2 © 1997, Libreria Editrice Vaticana [LEV]; *Code of Canon Law*, can. 1169 © 1985, Canon Law Society of America [CLSA]; *Book of Blessings*, no. 18 © 1989, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB]. — [†]*Norms for the Celebration of the Eucharist according to the Third Typical Edition of the Roman Missal in the Diocese of Arlington*, no. 77. — [†]These petitions are inspired by the recommendations for prayer during Communion for fellow Christians, those not receiving Communion, and non-Christians in *Guidelines for the Reception of Holy Communion* © 1996, USCCB — Excerpts and paraphrases from the following: *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* © 2010, International Commission on English in the Liturgy; *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America* © 2010, USCCB; *The Bread of Life* © 2010 United States Roman Catholic - Reformed Dialogue; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* © 1994, 1997, USCCB-LEV; *Guidelines for the Reception of Holy Communion*; *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* © 1993, LEV; *Ecclesia de Mysterio* © 1997, LEV; *Code of Canon Law* © 1985, CLSA; *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 1963.