



RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION DURING COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

May 4, 2020

There has been some interest expressed, in particular, to the directive issued restricting the reception of Holy Communion on the hand only. Bishop Kagan and Father Wayne Sattler offer the following explanation.

From Bishop Kagan: Father Wayne Sattler has written a helpful explanation of why, for the time being, I have restricted the reception of Holy Communion to the hand. As an addition to Fr. Wayne's statement, I want to offer a bit of canonical background to the issue. While in all things liturgical, Canon Law defers to liturgical law; liturgical law does not supercede Canon Law, but is a compliment to it as the general discipline of our Church. It is correct that communicants have the right to choose one of two ways to receive Holy Communion, just as penitents have the right to choose one of two ways of confessing sins. In both cases, the right is neither absolute nor is it exclusive. The minister of these two sacraments has an equal right not to distribute Holy Communion on the tongue or in the hand, and not to hear a person's confession either anonymously or face-to-face. The general principle of Church law, which includes liturgical law, is that Church law always admits exceptions unless the proper authority (pope or bishop) makes it explicit that there is no exception to it.

Let us also keep in mind those who are now making an issue of a certain form and discipline have missed what is essential altogether. It is not our physical posture that determines our moral and spiritual worthiness to receive Holy Communion, it is the state of our souls.

From Fr. Wayne Sattler, pastor at the Church of Saint Anne, Bismarck: In the midst of a logistical storm of making accommodations for returning to public Mass, one topic that is being raised is the concern over the directive to receive Holy Communion in the hand. It is important to keep clearly in mind, the motivation and the context with which this directive is being made.

The directive to receive Holy Communion in the hand is not being made from a theological standpoint, but of public safety. Just as are the directives for not receiving the Precious Blood, not extending a Sign of Peace, and the use of only Ordinary Ministers for administering Holy Communion, are also being made for public safety. There are some who could be tempted to take each one of those accommodations being made in light of our unprecedented situation in order to make a theological posture. Let us keep it firmly in the light of how all of these accommodations are being made with the motivation for public safety. Just as was the unprecedented accommodation of not having public Mass for what will nearly be seven weeks.

We are in the context of an unprecedented time. The measures being taken with COVID-19 cannot be compared to any previous virus. The measures of safety being practiced in every avenue of public life are unprecedented.

So the motivation is public safety, and the context is an unprecedented pandemic.

As pastors, just as we scrambled to make accommodations for Mass to be available online, and other accommodations for prayer and Sacraments, we are now working very hard to abide by what is being directed so that public Mass can be made available. It is perfectly fine to have a personal preference for how to receive Holy Communion. Both receiving in the hand and receiving on the tongue are valid methods. In order to have public Mass offered in our Diocese, among the many other directives being made with the motivation of public safety, receiving Holy Communion in the hand is currently one of them.

I am not a scientist or a doctor. Yet, in light of the current common measure of wearing a mask with the motivation to protect not yourself, but others, it can make sense that for a priest to place his hand that close to your mouth, in which there are certainly moments when your tongue is touched, and then to proceed to give communion to every one else without first sanitizing our hands would not be consistent with other common safety measures being exercised. Again, the motivation is not a theological one, it is public safety and the context is an unprecedented pandemic. The Bishop has given clear directives on how we may be able to proceed with offering public Mass. If your own personal preference remains so strong that you are not able to adapt for the purpose of the present unprecedented measures being taken for safety to the valid practice of receiving Holy Communion in the hand, you are free to make a spiritual communion at that time, as we have been doing for the past seven weeks.