



## DIOCESE OF FAIRBANKS

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*OFFICE OF THE BISHOP*

15 August 2018

### *On Some Aspects of the Eucharistic Celebration*

#### *Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The Second Vatican Council describes the celebration of the Eucharist as the “source and summit” of our lives as faithful Christians. Christ strengthens and nourishes us through the Scriptures and with His Body and Blood in order to carry out His mission in the world. Secondly, though, the Eucharistic celebration is meant to unite the Body of Christ. This union is accomplished through the common readings and prayers of the Mass, as well as the common postures that they take during worship.

Over the last few years as the Bishop of Fairbanks, I have noticed certain variations in the Eucharistic celebrations in our parishes. While some variation is to be expected, and is even permitted by the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), there are some universal norms that should be followed by all Catholics in the liturgy. As chief shepherd and liturgist of the diocese, I want to clarify some of the postures and attitudes we should have during the Mass.

It is important to remember that when we enter our churches, we are entering sacred space. This space has been set aside by the Church in a special way to draw us into closer communion with our Lord, who has given His very self for our salvation. As we enter the nave, we should remember to observe respectful silence. Casual conversation, boisterous laughter, and other verbal distractions should be avoided so we can prepare ourselves to enter into the sacrifice of the Mass. This same sacred silence also should be observed at the end of Mass so those who wish to offer prayers of thanksgiving may do so with minimal distraction. Casual conversation should be limited to social halls and vestibules of our churches as much as possible.

During the Mass, there are certain postures and gestures that should be observed by those participating. Common postures unite us in our common worship and, in a physical and tangible way, express the unity of the faithful. Different postures also signify the particular role each of us has in the celebration. Sitting, standing, kneeling, and bowing physically manifest the internal disposition we should have at various points in the celebration of the liturgy. When we fail to observe these common norms, the liturgy begins to break down and lose its unifying effect.

To maintain the solemnity and dignity of the liturgy, the following norms are to be reinforced or introduced in the parishes:

- During the Our Father, the GIRM does not specify a particular gesture for the assembly, but certain traditional norms are to be observed. First, the orans position (the stretching forth of the hands in prayer) is a gesture reserved to the presider and should only be done by the priest celebrant and

concelebrants. It has become common in many parishes to hold hands while praying the Lord's Prayer. This is not part of our tradition. Please be mindful of those who do not wish to do so, since it is not a requirement and there may be personal reasons people do not want to hold hands. If parishioners choose to hold hands, they should do so with the people immediately around them and not leave their pew. Such movement becomes very disruptive to the solemnity and flow of the liturgy.

- The GIRM directs that the “faithful kneel after the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) unless the Diocesan Bishop determines otherwise” (§43). The faithful of the diocese are asked to kneel at this time in all the parishes and chapels of our diocese.
- When receiving Holy Communion, the norm established for the Dioceses of the United States is that “Holy Communion is to be received standing, unless an individual member of the faithful wishes to receive Communion while kneeling” (§160). When receiving Communion, one may receive on the tongue or in the hand. If a member of the faithful receives on the hand, they are reminded to make “a throne for Jesus,” with one open palm under the other. It is strongly suggested that those unable to use their hands because of age or medical reasons, or those carrying small children, receive on the tongue to avoid dropping the Body of Christ.
- In addition, the faithful are reminded they are not to take the host, but to receive it and that intinction—the dipping of the Body of Christ into the Precious Blood—is not permitted in the Diocese of Fairbanks.

The norms listed above are to be implemented in the parishes and chapels along the road-system of the Diocese of Fairbanks no later than Saturday, September 15, 2018. Any questions regarding these norms should be directed to your parish priest or the chancery office.

Sincerely in Christ,



†Most Reverend Chad W. Zielinski  
Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska  
Diocese of Fairbanks



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