



The Last Supper, Anon, Colmar-Unterlinden Museum

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**FROM THE DIRECTOR**

“Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my body, which will be given up for you ... Do this in memory of me.” Jesus’s words from the Last Supper, recited in the Institution Narrative, invite us to engage in both memorial and offering during the most sacred part of the Mass. “Take this ... eat of it ... this is my body ... Do this in memory of me.” Jesus’s instructions are plain – *this* which has been taken, blessed and offered is what is returned to us, transformed for our consumption, for our Communion, for our spiritual transformation.

While the Church’s regulations and ideal praxis regarding the reception of Holy Communion are clear, in many parishes there remains a large gap between what the Church has instructed and what occurs in practice. To address this gap and offer a valuable explanation for why it is important that wherever possible the faithful receive Communion from hosts consecrated at the same Mass being celebrated, this newsletter focuses on the theology and correct practice of receiving Holy Communion at Mass. Receiving Holy Communion outside of Mass

(ie for Viaticum, or for the sick and housebound) is a separate issue. Multiple official documents reiterate the importance of communing from the same Mass we celebrate, from *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (1967) and *Eucharistiae Sacramentum* (1973), through to *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (2004) and the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2011). In this newsletter, Sr Prof Julia Upton RSM invites a re-reading of *Immensae Caritatis* (1973). In our Liturgy Spotlight, Rev Prof Gerard Kelly explores the theology undergirding receiving Communion from the same Mass being celebrated, and Dr Corinna Laughlin provides some helpful and practical pointers for implementing this important practice.



**Professor Clare V. Johnson**  
Director, ACU Centre for Liturgy  
Professor of Liturgical Studies and Sacramental Theology, Faculty of Theology and Philosophy



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# Receiving Communion at Mass



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When receiving communion at Mass, how much notice do people take of where the hosts have come from? Are they from those that were brought up in the procession of gifts, and which were offered to God in the Eucharistic Prayer? Or has someone gone to a tabernacle and brought them from there? Lack of awareness of the difference between these two scenarios might signal a somewhat incomplete understanding of what we are doing when we celebrate the Eucharist.

In the Eucharistic Liturgy, everyone is participating in an act of worship of God. The prayers of the liturgy refer to our worship as a “sacrifice” or “oblation”. In religious “sacrifice” there is a movement: offering to God and receiving back from God. That movement begins with the procession of gifts of bread and wine, continues in the Eucharistic Prayer where they are offered to God, and concludes at Communion, where all receive this

sanctified gift from God. The logic of the liturgy means that the reception of communion is integral to what has preceded; it completes the sacrificial action. To receive communion from hosts consecrated at a different Mass weakens the link with what is happening at this celebration.

The logic of the integrity of the sacrificial action is always visible by the fact that the priest never receives communion from hosts that were consecrated at another Mass. But what about the lay faithful? They are not present as “observers” of the sacrificial offering made by the priest. Rather, they too join in the offering. After the gifts have been brought to the altar, the priest asks the faithful to “pray that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable ...”. In Eucharistic Prayer I, the priest prays, “... we, your servants and your holy people, offer to your glorious majesty from the gifts you have given us ...”, Likewise, in Eucharistic Prayer III, the priest prays, “Look we pray on the oblation of your Church ...”. These prayers indicate that all who are present are participants in the sacrificial action that is happening in this liturgy.

That sacrificial action is the memorial of the action of Jesus at the Last Supper and hence of his saving death and resurrection. Memorial is something far more profound than remembering a past event. In the liturgical memorial, the once-for-all saving event of Christ is present, and we all participate in his self-offering to the Father. This is what it means to speak of our participation in the liturgical action as a “communion” in the body and blood of Christ (Cf. 1 Cor 10:16-17) and hence a communion in the divine life. Our liturgical reception of communion is a true sign of communion in the saving action of Christ.

Of course, Christ is truly present in the hosts that might be brought from the

tabernacle for holy communion. Those who receive communion from these hosts are not receiving less of Christ. Similarly, those who receive communion at a Communion Service (ie outside Mass) are not receiving less of Christ. However, the focus has changed from full participation in the liturgical action – the sacrifice of Christ – to a personal encounter with Christ present in the Eucharist. These are two different forms of Eucharistic piety, with one being more communal and the other more personal. By way of analogy, it is the difference between seeing the Eucharist as an “action” or as a “thing”. Liturgical Eucharistic piety recognises that the action of the Eucharist brings about the unity of the Church. Having participated in the sacrificial action, which culminates in the receiving of holy communion, we become what we receive, namely the Body of Christ, the Church. Eucharistic Prayer III prays, “... grant that we who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ.”

In practice, it is not always easy to judge the number of hosts that will be needed at Mass. But week by week, most parishes can learn to make a reasonable guess. The situation where most of the congregation receive communion from the tabernacle indicates a different Eucharistic sensibility to one where only a handful of people do.



**Father Gerard Kelly STL, STD, PhD (Th)** is a priest of the Archdiocese of Sydney and professor of Theology at the Catholic Institute of Sydney.

## NEWS AND RECENT EVENTS

Prof Johnson presented professional learning workshops on 6 March for the staff of St Kevin's Primary School Hampton Park.

A professional development day was facilitated by Prof Johnson on 10 March for the staffs of Corpus Christi Kingsville, St Augustine's Yarraville and Annunciation Catholic Primary School Brooklyn.

In preparation for the International Eucharistic Congress in 2028, ACU's Faculty of Theology and Philosophy is running THLS601 Eucharist: a postgraduate intensive unit for academic credit and a concurrent professional learning seminar taught by Prof Clare Johnson and guests. This unit will explore the biblical and anthropological roots of the Eucharist and trace the development of its major theological themes of participation in the Paschal Mystery, sacrifice, presence, communion,

blessing and devotion, and the historical evolution of the Eucharist across a range of Christian traditions and time periods. It will investigate why the proper ritual celebration of the Eucharist today is central to the identity and mission of the Catholic Church.

For enquiries relating to postgraduate course credit, contact [FTP.PG@acu.edu.au](mailto:FTP.PG@acu.edu.au), and to learn more about participating in the professional learning seminar, visit [acu.edu.au/PL-CfL](http://acu.edu.au/PL-CfL).

## FROM OUR BOARD OF ADVISORS

Shortly after *Immensae Caritatis* was published on 29 January 1973, I was installed as a Eucharistic Minister – as we were called in those days – at the high school where I was teaching at that time. We had gone through all the requisite training; however, the first time I distributed Holy Communion at Mass, I was struck at how profound the exchange of faith was for me. As I held up the host, looked into the communicant's eyes, and said "The Body of Christ!" I believed more fervently than ever before. The experience has never left me and remains each time I am asked to distribute Holy Communion in either form. I never go on automatic pilot.

Perhaps inspired by Pope Leo's recent recommendation to reread the Documents of Vatican II, before beginning to write this piece, I reread the 1973 Instruction on facilitating sacramental communion in particular circumstances, *Immensae Caritatis*. I found several surprises there and trust you will too.



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Giovanni Portelli

## SHARING GOOD PRACTICE



Pezels

"It is most desirable that the faithful, just as the Priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord's Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass ... so that even by means of the signs Communion may stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated" (GIRM, 85). "Most desirable" though it is, the practice is not widespread. Sometimes this comes from indifference to the importance of signs, but more often, logistics are what get in the way.

There is no one right way to make this Church's vision a reality. How you implement this practice will depend on the realities of the place where you minister, especially the help you have and the size and stability of the community. Here are a few practical points to consider.

This takes work. Making it possible for each person to receive from hosts consecrated at the Mass requires effort. It means paying close attention to the assembly gathered for each Mass (not a bad thing to do!). It will never happen automatically – but it will get easier with time.

It comes down to counting. The best way to know how many people are present is simple: count them! This tends to be quite easy at a weekday Mass – the sacristan can count those present and put out the appropriate number of hosts. With large assemblies, it is more challenging. But most communities count at least occasionally for diocesan census weekends. That practice can be extended to every week of the year. The ushers or hospitality ministers take up the count and give it to the sacristan. It's typically easier, and more accurate, to count when the assembly sits for the Liturgy of the Word, and if the church is quite full, it can be easier to count the empty seats. Over time, your team will develop a sixth sense for the numbers in attendance at a given service.

So when do the hosts in the ciborium get used? The reserved sacrament in the tabernacle is still of great importance, not only for adoration, but for taking Holy Communion to those who cannot join in the Mass. When there are more hosts in the tabernacle than you can use, they can be distributed at Mass. In my parish,

when there are many hosts left over, we do this during weekday Masses. When you do need to go to the tabernacle, do so unostentatiously, bringing the ciborium out only when it is needed, towards the end of communion.

Be flexible. This process is not an exact science. Not everyone present will participate in Holy Communion – and not everyone who goes to Holy Communion will be at Mass in time to be counted! It will seldom be perfect – and that is okay. The important thing is that we make an effort to let this important sign shine forth for those who participate in the Eucharist.



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# Engage our expertise

## Online training programs for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and Ministers of the Word

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## Parish training and formation workshops

ACU Centre for Liturgy offers a variety of in-person workshops for parish ministers and liturgical musicians. We can also provide detailed advice and specific strategies to improve liturgical celebrations in your parish through a comprehensive liturgy or liturgical music audit.

## Professional development for teachers and religious education leaders

We tailor workshops and professional development sessions for schools and Catholic education offices to extend knowledge of liturgical celebrations and sacramental preparation.

## Develop your skills as a presider at liturgy

Clergy can engage in our specialised professional development sessions on a range of topics from presidential singing to the art of presiding at worship and the craft of preaching.

## Bring our experts to you

Our academics and specialists are available to deliver keynote addresses, public lectures and conference workshops on liturgy and sacraments that are designed to meet the needs of your organisation or event.

## Contact us

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*Pixabay*

## Study liturgy and sacramental theology

You can study academic courses or undertake higher degree research in liturgical studies, sacramental theology and the sacred arts through ACU's Faculty of Theology and Philosophy. Contact us at [CentreforLiturgy@acu.edu.au](mailto:CentreforLiturgy@acu.edu.au) for further information.

## Speaking of Liturgy podcast

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## Academic and pastoral publications

For links to our latest academic research in liturgy and sacraments and to our useful practical pastoral publications, visit [acu.edu.au/centre](http://acu.edu.au/centre) for liturgy.

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