

Church Conduct: Reception of Holy Communion, Part One

By Pastor Thomas Goodroad

From time to time, Pastor Moline and I get questions about what to do in church at particular places or times in the service. We love getting and answering these questions! But it also got me thinking... Maybe others have these same questions, and would benefit from hearing the answers, too. So, I'm starting this series of articles for the *News & Notes* that will hopefully answer some frequently asked, or, at least, frequently thought-of, questions about church conduct. I encourage you to ask questions when they come to mind! We are here to teach you and be a helpful resource to you in your faith.

This first article will pertain to reception of Holy Communion. Right out of the gate, I want you to know that, as long as you share the confession of the LC-MS, properly discern the Body and Blood in, with, and under the bread and wine, and seek to reverently receive Communion for the forgiveness of your sins, many other things are not significant. The main thing, as Luther says, are the words, "given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins" and the bodily eating and drinking. "Whoever believes these words has exactly what they say: 'forgiveness of sins.'" (*Luther's Small Catechism, The Sacrament of the Altar*) In other words, it does not matter if you kneel or stand at the rail, if you cross yourself after you get up and return to your seat, and so on. What matters is the forgiveness of sins found in this, the Sacrament of the Altar.

That being said, here are a few reverent practices that you may implement, if, and only if, you find them 1) to be helpful to your faith and Christian piety and 2) not to be a distraction or a hindrance to your worship.

Before Communing: In the front cover of the hymnal, there are several prayers for private, silent use during the service. Before being released from the pew by the usher (preferably ahead of time so as not to cause undue delay to approaching the rail...), bow your head and silently pray the prayer entitled *Before Communing*, beginning and ending with crossing yourself in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This, along with the singing of the Communion Hymns, is to help you enter a reverent mindset in which you receive the Body and Blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

While at the rail: It's a good practice to approach the rail with folded hands, if they are not otherwise occupied, and, when the Pastor welcomes you to the Lord's Table, bow in reverence (this is not a bow to Pastor, but to God). While at the rail, but before you receive the Supper, it is a good practice to meditate on your actions since the last time you received the Supper in order to focus on the forgiveness that you are receiving from God for any particular sins that have bothered you personally. If you are not partaking in Communion that day, whether that is due to a troubled conscience like that described in Matthew 5:23-24, you are under the ban, or you are not yet in communion fellowship with the church, you may approach the rail with your arms crossed on your chest and the Pastor will give a blessing. If you have friends or family visiting with you that day that we are not in communion fellowship with, you can also tell them this! They are welcome to come to the rail and receive a blessing from the pastor, but it certainly

helps if they already know to cross their arms, like I mentioned above, in addition to talking to the pastors before the service. This will avoid a potential disruption in the distribution.

This article will be continued in next week's *News & Notes*.

God's richest blessings in Christ!

Pastor Goodroad