

Church Conduct: Reception of Holy Communion, Part Two

By Pastor Thomas Goodroad

This is the second installment, as well as a continuation of the last article, in a series of articles I have titled “Church Conduct.” I encourage you to read the previous article for a better picture of what I will be talking about in this series! As I said in my first article, these are some things that answer questions that Pastor Moline and I have received over the past few months, as well as some helpful advice on how to reverently receive communion at the Altar of our Lord. If these are helpful to you, I encourage you to implement them. If they are not helpful, or, worse, are a hindrance to you, I encourage you to ignore them and continue to worship God in the way that is most conducive to your hearing the Word and receiving the Sacrament in a reverent way.

Receiving the Body: Some choose to receive the Body of Christ directly on the tongue from the Pastor’s hand to confess the blessings they receive are not by their own doing, but are a gift received from God; others choose to hold out the hand for the Body and place it in their mouth themselves for the practical reason that it is easier to do and leaves less room for error. These are both fine practices. When receiving on the tongue, it is a good practice to hold the head erect or slightly tilted backward, open the mouth moderately, and place the tip of the tongue against the lower lip. When receiving in the hand, it is good to hold the left hand over the right hand, slightly cupped, then use the right hand to place the Body in your mouth, to confess that the blessings of God come from His right hand. It’s also a good practice to respond with a firm “Amen!” When the Pastor says, “The Body of Christ” during the distribution.

Receiving the Blood: Here at Good Shepherd, both the individual cups and the common cup are offered. Both contain the same Blood of Christ which delivers the same forgiveness of sins. Some choose to partake from the individual cups for convenience, or to assuage the conscience from sharing a cup with others, along with what that could entail. Others choose to partake from the common cup to more closely follow the practice at Jesus’ time during the Last Supper and confess solidarity with the church throughout history up until the last century. When partaking with an individual cup, it is good to tilt your head back far enough to leave as little Blood in the cup as possible; after all, Jesus commanded us to drink it. When partaking from the common cup, it is common practice to help guide the cup with one or both hands by gently placing them on a part of the cup not covered by the hand of the Pastor. Generally speaking, use the right hand on the body of the cup, the left hand on the base of the cup, or both. It is easiest to leave your head erect and move the cup to your mouth, as opposed to tilting your head forward to meet the cup. As with receiving the Body, it is a good confession of faith to reply “Amen!” after the Pastor says “The Blood of Christ,” or whatever form he may use at the time. The Amen will generally happen after the partaking of Christ’s Blood has occurred.

Departing the rail: During the dismissal from the rail, it is a good practice to cross yourself before standing, bowing, and returning reverently to your seat. If you have an individual cup in your hand, place it gently into the basket resting on the stand in front of the Baptismal font so that it rests right side up, in order to not spill any remnants of Christ’s Blood into the basket lining. Once in your seat, you may want to silently pray the prayer in the front cover of your hymnal entitled *Thanksgiving After Receiving the Sacrament*.

General Rules of Thumb: If there is a mistake and something is spilled, it is best to bring it to the attention of the Pastor during the distribution. If a wafer, or part of a wafer, fell, point it out to the Pastor so it can be properly dealt with. If there is some wine spilled on the rail or the floor, point it out to the pastor so that it can be wiped up with a purificator (A white linen cloth commonly used to wipe the rim of the cup or to deal with small spills at the altar, laundered in a different manner than other linens). It is also best that any kind of lip application be used at a minimum before communing. This includes Chapstick or lip balms, but colored makeup like lipstick is a point of particular attention. It is best to ensure that lipstick is not in danger of leaving residue on the cup, so as not to be transferred to the purificator after wiping the cup to prevent undue messes or hard to get-out stains. The Altar Guild ladies will thank you!

That concludes this article on Church Conduct! If you have questions, concerns, or comments, please feel free to talk to the pastors! If there is a particular area that you would like to see covered in this series of articles, please reach out to either Pastor Moline or myself and we will be glad to take it under consideration.

Blessings in Christ!

Pastor Goodroad