

## The Mass (Part XXX)

by Fr. Tim Church

### Communion (Part 3)

We continue with miscellaneous concerns related to communion at Mass. For those who remember the Mass before its revision under Pope Paul VI (post Vatican II) the idea of receiving communion with the cup was simply unheard of. There are still many circumstances when receiving the Blood of Christ in communion is uncommon. In some parts of the world the cup is not offered. In the United States (and many other places) it is becoming the norm.

This dramatic movement from not making the cup available to the people to it being a common means of receiving communion is based the following:

*“Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it is distributed under both kinds. For in this form, the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident, and clear expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the relationship between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Father’s Kingdom.” (General Instructions of the Roman Missal, # 281)*

It should be noted that the reason (above) for receiving communion under both species is that it is a “fuller sign”. This may be confusing to people who know about the Protestant controversy concerning the Real Presence of Christ. Some Protestants explain the effect of the communion as merely a sign of Christ’s presence, and that his Presence is not as the Catholics teach. A sign is something that represents something else. Catholics believe that the presence of Christ in the species of bread and wine is what it represents. However, it is also a sign:

*“The signs of bread and wine become, in a way surpassing understanding, the Body and Blood of Christ; they continue also to signify the goodness of creation.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, # 1333)*

So, what exactly is the significance of receiving the cup, in terms of it being a “fuller form as a sign”? The answer here is much more than we might think. It is related to the Passover meal, the whole preparation for the people of God for the coming of Christ, the future Kingdom of God where we will drink of the fruit of redemption, even the very sacrifice of Jesus who shed his blood for us. The power of a sign is more greatly enhanced by our awareness, our paying attention to what is going on, and a reflective and thoughtful approach to communion. However, in terms of the true effect of communion, the fullness of Christ’s presence is contained in each of the species, and this is not dependent on our own disposition. Jesus is completely present, even if we are not aware.

*“The Catholic faith teaches that Christ, whole and entire, and the true Sacrament, is received even under only one species, and consequently that as far as the effects are concerned, those who receive under only one species are not deprived of any of the grace that is necessary for salvation.” (General Instructions of the Roman Missal, # 282)*

Therefore, a person receives communion without diminishing the power of the grace by receiving only one species.

True caution needs to be taken on the part of all involved in receiving the cup. The danger of spilling the precious blood of Jesus must be taken seriously, not only by the minister of communion but also by the person receiving. The posture of standing and of taking the cup into both hands places the burden of care on the person receiving. Moving slowly and cautiously and only receiving a very small amount from the cup will help to ensure that nothing is lost. If a spill does occur, these are the instructions:

*“If a host or any particle should fall, it is to be picked up reverently. If any of the Precious Blood is spilled, the area where the spill occurred should be washed with water, and this water should then be poured into the sacrarium in the sacristy.”* (**General Instructions of the Roman Missal, # 280**)

(**Note:** A “sacrarium” is a specially piped sink that drains to the ground rather than the sewer.)