

“Why Are We Standing During Communion?”

You may have missed the Bishop’s article in the last Valley Catholic, or the insert in our bulletin, or the masses in which Fr. Jack and Fr. Ray spoke about this posture during communion, and found yourself wondering what’s going on all of a sudden in our church (and other churches you may visit). Here are some answers to a few of the questions that people have been asking.

“Whose idea was it to have us stand?”

On Holy Thursday in the year 2000, Pope John Paul II issued a revised *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. That is where such things as posture at Mass are spelled out in detail. After that, it took more than two years for the U.S. Bishops to agree on how they were going to adapt the Pope’s universal norms for use in the United States, and then submit them to the Vatican for approval. Following that process, each bishop may then determine when and how new instructions will be carried in his diocese. After many months of consultation and discussion with priests and liturgists throughout our diocese, Bishop Patrick McGrath recently issued a statement about the norms for posture within our diocese.

“Why did they decide to change the posture during Communion?”

One of the ironies of this “new” directive is that it isn’t actually new; it is the same rubric that was in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (or G.I.R.M.) in 1969. However, there were so many changes in the church at that time and in the years to follow, that many churches never gave it much attention.

However, if you observe the Communion procession at almost any church in the United States on a Sunday morning, you will notice that our Communion does not convey a sense of unity. Some people are walking forward, some are sitting, some are singing, some are kneeling in private prayer, etc. There often seems to be little awareness of the assembly as one body – the Body of Christ.

Many of us were taught, especially in the years before Vatican II, that Communion was a time of private prayer with Jesus. However, one of the key themes of the reforms of Vatican II was that every celebration of the liturgy is a communal act, a public worship of the entire church, and that individual pieties must not supersede the worship of the community.



Receiving Communion is not merely a matter of individuals standing in a line to “get Jesus.” Rather, it is a procession, a pilgrimage, of the People of God on the way to the Promised Land. The Church is asking us to stand together, and sing together, until all have received communion. This is an act of faith, which signifies our awareness and respect for the Body of Christ. (In our parish, we will remain standing until the gold ciborium, containing the Consecrated Bread that will be brought to the sick and homebound, is carried away to the Tabernacle in the Chapel.)

“If we are busy standing and singing together during Communion, when will we have quiet time for prayer?”

While St. Augustine wrote that to sing is to pray twice, we also recognize our need for silent prayer. Therefore, when the assembly is seated after the Communion procession, the Church also asks us to spend some time in prayerful silence. We are often not comfortable with such silence, and we will all (including the ministers) need to learn to nurture it and to treasure it. We may even find that these new changes enhance our sense of prayer.