

Communion from the Cup

In God's Word

"Take this, all of you, and eat it."

"Take this, all of you, and drink from it."



We celebrate a more complete sign of Jesus' love for us.



We are nourished with the bread of life and the cup of salvation.

We share in Jesus' promise of everlasting life, and we have a first taste of the glorious banquet that Jesus will give us when we join with him at his table in heaven.

Communion from the cup helps us to have a fuller experience of the joyful banquet to which Jesus is inviting all his brothers and sisters.



In the culture in which Jesus lived, and all around the Mediterranean Sea, drinking wine with a meal was a sign of festivity and rejoicing, for wine was used to mark special occasions and celebrations. People saw wine as one of God's blessings, given for our use and enjoyment (Ps 104.15). It was a sign and reminder of the heavenly banquet (Is 25.6; Lk 22.18). Jesus drank wine (Lk 7.33-34) and provided a plentiful supply of the best wine for the couple at Cana (Jn 2.1-11).

Jesus' promise: "Jesus said to them: 'Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them' " (Jn 6.54-56).

At the Last Supper: Jesus made it possible for us to eat his flesh and drink his blood, and so share in his life. He took some bread and wine, gave thanks and praise to God, and gave them to his disciples to eat and drink. Then Jesus told them to do this in his memory.

St. Paul: Continuing this practice, Paul handed on to the people the teaching he had received from Jesus about the Eucharist: On the night before Jesus died, he took some bread and wine. He gave thanks to God over them and gave them to his disciples to eat and drink. Then he commanded them to do this as their way of remembering him. (See 1 Cor 11.23-32.)

In our time: In our Eucharist we continue to respond to Jesus' invitation. We give thanks to God as we continue to tell — in word and deed — the story of Jesus. On the night before he died, he took bread and wine, gave thanks to God over them, and gave them to his followers: "Take this... and eat it: this is my body... Take this... and drink from it: this is the cup of my blood... Do this in memory of me."

In Our History

Our first centuries: During the first three or four centuries it was normal for Christians to receive communion under both forms each time they took part in celebrating the Eucharist. People knew that they were baptized into the body of Christ, the Church, and sought the nourishment of the eucharistic banquet to strengthen them in their daily living for God. The Eucharist was recognized by all believers as a holy food and drink for the holy people of God.

In the Middle Ages: The fervour of the earlier centuries cooled somewhat as the Church entered the period known as the Middle Ages. Although the vernacular languages of modern Europe were beginning to develop, the Mass remained in Latin. As a result, participation in the Eucharist declined as people no longer understood Latin. The eucharistic prayer became silent, the altar grew more distant from the people, and the clergy gradually took over all the ministries.



Communion from the Cup

Because of fear and a misunderstanding of the Eucharist, many people refrained from communion to the extent that the Church authority had to command people to receive communion at least once a year. As the frequency of communion declined, so did communion from the cup for the laity.

As the Church's understanding of the Eucharist developed, it came to be more clearly understood that the whole Christ is truly present either in the form of bread or in the form of wine. The practice of communion in the form of bread alone eventually became common for all except the presiding priest.



Restoring the Cup

A gradual movement to renewal culminated in the Second Vatican Council's call to the whole Church to open itself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Many reforms took place in our worship; these include celebrations in our own language and the restoration of ministries to the people. We were invited once more to live up to the privilege and responsibility of our baptismal sharing in the priesthood of Jesus and to take our full part in the liturgy as the main source of our Christian spirit. "The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy" (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, # 14).

Eucharistic banquet: Today's people of God are becoming more aware of the command of Jesus and of the meaning of the symbols we use. We eat and drink in the name of the Lord, responding to our Lord's invitation at the Last Supper. We recognize that our eucharistic celebration is a foretaste of the joyous banquet in the kingdom of heaven. We are being nourished by Christ's body and blood so that we may share in his life and work. We are strengthened by this holy sacrifice and banquet, and are made more like Christ: in obedience to our Father in heaven, in love for God and for one another.

Gradual return: Since Vatican II we have gradually increased the number of occasions when we receive communion under both forms. We are beginning to recognize the importance of this symbol of the cup: Jesus' blood is poured out to save us from our sins.

As we take part in the joyful banquet, we are also ready to share with him in the cup of his suffering, in order that we may one day share in his glory.

How do we receive communion from the cup?

At the preparation of the gifts the bread and the wine to be consecrated are brought to the altar by members of the congregation. One cup filled with wine is placed on the altar (together with carafes as needed). The sign of one cup — the cup of blessing (1 Cor 10.16) — on the altar reflects the unity of the Church.

While the Lamb of God is sung, communion ministers may assist in breaking the bread (especially if there is a large amount). When communion is given from the cup, there are usually two ministers of the cup for each minister of the eucharistic bread.

Receiving from the cup: After responding with Amen, we take the eucharistic bread as usual in the hand or on the tongue, and eat it with reverence. Then we approach the minister with the cup. This minister gives us the cup, saying The blood of Christ. We answer Amen, and take it with both hands, one on the base, the other on the stem or bottom of the cup. We lift it gently to our lips, drink a small amount, and return the cup to the minister, who wipes the cup carefully and thoroughly. Singing accompanies the communion procession.

Ministry: Communion under both forms provides an opportunity for some to serve the community by giving the body and blood of Christ to their brothers and sisters in faith. Individuals should be ready to serve in this ministry when asked and commissioned.