

Liturgy of the Eucharist

Communion Rite

The Breaking of Bread

In an act symbolic of Christ's breaking of bread at the Last Supper, the priest breaks the Eucharistic bread after the sign of peace, indicating that the many faithful are made one body by receiving Communion from the one Bread of Life. The priest then places a small piece of the host in the chalice containing the wine to signify the unity of the Body and Blood of the Lord in the work of salvation. The deacon or priest places the consecrated bread in several ciboria (large vessels), and pours the Precious Blood into enough additional chalices as are required for the distribution of Holy Communion.

Distribution of Holy Communion

During the invitation, which precedes the distribution of Communion, the priest shows the Eucharistic bread to the people as he says aloud, "This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Happy are those who are called to his supper." Since all share in one and the same Eucharist, both the priest and the people respond, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed."

The presiding priest, as leader of the celebration and in accord with ancient usage, remains the first to receive the consecrated bread and wine. Before distributing the Lord's body to each communicant the priest or minister shows the host to each person by raising it slightly above the ciborium saying, "The Body of Christ." The communicant responds, "Amen." A similar formula, "The blood of Christ," precedes the reception from the chalice. In the United States the faithful have the option to receive either in the hand or on the tongue, an option permitted since 1977. The norm is that communicants are to receive Communion while standing. As a sign of reverence the communicant bows his or her head before receiving the Eucharistic bread.