

The Communion Rite: Take and eat, take and drink – some history

In the gospel for last Sunday's Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ we heard Jesus' invitation to "*take and eat, take and drink*" his body and blood, his very life. We accept his invitation when we, as St. Paul says, participate in the body and blood of Christ at Communion during Mass. In their teaching on the Eucharist, our United States Bishops say *While the heart of the celebration of the Eucharist is the Eucharistic Prayer, the consummation of the Mass is found in Holy Communion, when we eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ. We are joined together as members of Christ's mystical Body, sharing the one life of the Spirit. In the great sacrament of the altar, we are joined to Christ Jesus and to one another.* {Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion 2001} The bishops speak further about the practice reintroduced at Vatican II in which all the people, not just the priest, receive communion from the cup as well as the host: *From the first days of the Church's celebration of the Eucharist, Holy Communion consisted of the reception of both species in fulfillment of the Lord's command to "take and eat . . . take and drink." The distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful under both kinds was the norm for more than a thousand years of Catholic liturgical practice. The practice of Holy Communion under both kinds at Mass continued until the late eleventh century, when the custom of distributing the Eucharist to the faithful under the form of bread alone began to grow. By the twelfth century Communion under only one kind had become customary in the Church. In 1415 the Council of Constance decreed that Holy Communion under the form of bread alone would be distributed to the faithful.* The Council of Trent allowed for Communion under both kinds when permitted by local bishops, but it was not widely practiced again until 1963 when the Second Vatican Council authorized Communion under both kinds for all. The "why" for reintroducing it is that *Holy Communion has a more complete form as a sign when it is received under both kinds. This manner of reception allows a fuller sign of the Eucharistic banquet to shine forth* {Norms} as the people are truly able to "*take and drink*" as Jesus says.

Please let us know what else about our faith tradition you'd like to find out more about. Contact our Council for Catechesis at tkautza@saintmaryhc.org.