

A Little Side Trip

Over the past two weeks we have reflected on two ways of receiving communion that were reintroduced since the renewal of the Liturgy at the Second Vatican Council, receiving communion in the hand and from the cup. I noted that both these practices were reintroduced in recent years, and not introduced as if for the first time. Communion in the hand was customary until the ninth century, and communion from the cup was customary until the thirteenth century. For those of us of the “older generation” {those born and raised before the Council}, we had *always* received only communion hosts in the mouth until after the time of the Council; while for those of us of the “younger generation” {those born and raised after the Council}, communion in the hand and from the cup have *always* been optional ways communion could be received. The reflection I offer this week is what Mike Lawler who taught theology at Creighton University says about the benefit of knowing church history. We all have a strong tendency to view (and insist!) on our *personal* experience of things as “just the way things are” or are “meant to be”. We easily tend to think that how *we* have known things has been the way they have *always* been done. But Professor Lawler says *The great advantage of knowing church history is that you know when ALWAYS began!* One of the most interesting and valuable lessons I have learned and relearned from doing these *What Are We Doing and Why?* reflections has been just how long standing and varied our Catholic liturgical traditions and prayer practices have been. I have been a Catholic for 59 years, and a “Vatican II Catholic” for about 46 of those years. But as I have written things like what I wrote above, *Communion in the hand was customary until the ninth century, and communion from the cup was customary until the thirteenth century* I have gained a great appreciation of just how much bigger our Tradition is than my very brief and limited personal experience of it. For me, *always* began 59 years ago. For the Church, it began about 2000 years ago, and even longer when we account for our roots in the Jewish traditions that Jesus was born into.