

cloth afterwards.

(6) If a subdeacon or acolyte is present, cross your arms over your chest, and allow the subdeacon to hold the cloth under your chin. **Do not take hold of the cloth:** three sets of hands around the chalice (the priest's, the subdeacon's, and yours) present more risk of accidents. Instead, allow the subdeacon to wipe your lips.

(7) Many parishes have the practice of the faithful kissing the chalice following Communion; try to follow local practice.

(8) One should not kiss the priest's hand after receiving the Holy Mysteries (whenever you do kiss the hand of a priest, the kiss should be short, with closed lips (not a "smooch", as one priest described it). This is a show of reverence for the hand that touches the Holy Mysteries, not as a show of respect for the seniority of the priest. Other than after Communion, one should always kiss the hand of the priest, regardless of whether you like the priest or not, whether he is an elder or a newly ordained young priest.

You'll notice that priests normally and properly kiss each other's hand upon meeting, out of reverence for Christ's Body and Blood, which they hold at Liturgy.

Following Communion

It is an ancient practice throughout the Orthodox Church (East and West) to partake of blessed bread or *andidoron* following Holy Communion. This may be followed by some holy water, regular warm or cold water, or warm wine (called *sapifka* in Slavic tradition, usually offered in cold climates). The goal of this practice is the clearing of the mouth, in order that all the Holy Mysteries would be consumed. One should take enough of these to accomplish this, leaving the rest for others.

It is also a faithful practice to take blessed bread home, allow it to dry out, and to consume a portion

with holy water every morning. It is an act of Christian love to bring a piece of this holy bread to faithful Orthodox who cannot attend the Liturgy due to sickness. In all cases, the holy *andidoron* should be treated with care, and if it is not consumed, all crumbs should be placed outside, in low-traffic areas, for the birds to consume.

Many parishes read the Prayers of Thanksgiving after Communion; if this is not done at the parish, one should do it alone, either quietly in the church, or immediately after arriving home. Following Holy Communion, one should be careful to avoid spitting, chewing gum, having dental work done, or any activity which might cause the Holy Mysteries to be spilled out of the mouth; this includes being careful to avoid throwing up (if one is nauseous to the point of possibly vomiting, one should avoid Communion that day in any case).

If the Holy Mysteries are for any reason dropped from the mouth, they should be carefully and entirely contained in a cloth, dried, and given to the priest for pious and careful disposal according to the canons of the Church.

The Holy Mysteries of Communion are the great Medicine of the Lord's Body and Blood, given by Christ to us for our healing, help, and salvation. Every Orthodox Christian should partake of them with great regularity, for without them - without Christ - we can really do nothing.

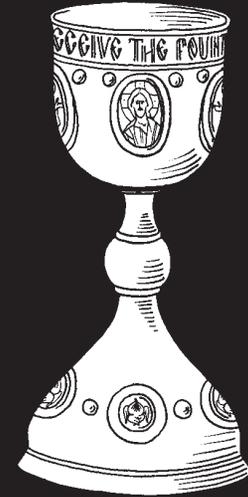
DESERT WISDOM BOOK ROOM

All Saints of North America
Orthodox Church

www.asna.ca

(905) 318-6436

Holy Communion



A Guide to Preparation, Reception, and Conduct Following the Holy Mysteries

There are no practical questions more common within the Church than those around the Holy Mystery of Communion. How do I prepare? Should I receive at all? And how should I conduct myself afterwards?

To approach the Holy Mysteries is to approach the Lord Himself. One must do so with fear and awe, noting Christ's words that he who receives unworthily drinks judgement upon himself (1 Cor

11:27)

As we prepare to receive Holy Communion, the hymns of the Liturgy call us to “lay aside all earthly cares”. We do this in several ways.

Preparation

Firstly, we observe a fast before Communion. From the evening before (usually from midnight), we have nothing to eat or drink (medications are permitted - speak with your confessor about how best to approach this). Along with fasting from food and drink, we also set aside worldly entertainment with a quiet evening free from television, riotous socializing and parties, as well as marital relations. Many pious faithful will also abstain from eating meat.

We also prepare ourselves through prayer: traditionally, faithful people would attend the full Vigil service, and say several Akathists at home. Today, most people prepare by simply attending Vespers, saying the appropriate evening prayers, and praying the prayers before Holy Communion (read aloud in monasteries and some parishes just before Holy Communion is given).

In some areas, there has arisen a practice of strict fasting from meat and other foods for three days or a week. Traditionally, this is the way in which a person who is out of Communion with the Church prepares for their return; if one has not received Communion in months, this is appropriate to do. In many areas where people do not receive Communion every Sunday, this has become the norm, but its roots come from Church canon law: when one is away from the chalice for three weeks, without reason of health, according to Church canons, one is excommunicated.

When one prepares faithfully each week to receive Holy Communion, such a strict fast is not normally necessary.

We also prepare for Communion through **regular Confession**. A general rule for Confession for those who follow the traditional practice of Communion at each Liturgy, is to approach for Confession once every month. Some parishes follow a minimal

practice of Confession once during each of the four fasting periods. This is more an outgrowth of having huge parishes with a single priest, who could not possibly handle monthly confessions from all parish members. If one has more serious sins, such as public heresy, sexual sins, or apostasy from the Orthodox faith, one should approach Confession immediately in any case.

It should be noted that according to Church canons, anyone who has not partaken of Holy Communion for three weeks (barring health reasons) is out of communion with the Church. Traditionally, this meant not being able to partake of other Holy Mysteries (such as marriage), or to have a Church funeral. Today, because of human weakness, this is generally relaxed, else some parishes would never serve a funeral!

Even a priest cannot serve Liturgy alone - therefore, he cannot take Communion when no one else is present: it is union with Christ *and the Church*.

The important thing to remember is this: **the Liturgy is served every Sunday and on feast days in order to make Holy Communion available to the faithful**: if this were not the central purpose, a shorter service called the Typica would be served. Yet, every priest and bishop is called to serve the Liturgy - because **all the faithful are called to receive the Holy Mysteries of Communion**. Communion isn't for holy people: it is intended to make unholy people more like Christ, to help us in our struggles, like a spiritual medicine.

To avoid Holy Communion for weeks or months at a time is like avoiding medicine that would save our life.

When should I not receive?

There are several conditions under which someone should not receive Communion:

(1) If you are not an Orthodox Christian;

(2) If you are visiting a church that is not in communion with your bishop (check with your priest to make sure)

(3) If you have not gone to Confession in a long time (ask the parish priest about this - if it is more than a month or two, make an appointment - and go!)

(4) Traditionally, one does not approach Holy Communion when bleeding. This is not an outdated superstition: the whole Old and New Testament tradition teaches that life is in the blood. Whether one is going through a menstrual cycle, has an open wound, or has a bleeding nose (which even priests experience!), one should wait until the next Liturgy, or until bleeding stops. Of course, like all things in the Church, economy is exercised, especially in cases of serious health conditions. The final decision is up to the parish priest under the direction of the bishop.

Taking Communion

It is important to approach the chalice with care and reverence. The following points should be observed:

(1) Don't make the Sign of the Cross or move abruptly anywhere near the priest - this can upset the chalice. Instead, make the Cross long before you receive, and move gently and carefully.

(2) Don't close your eyes. If you can't see, there is a tendency to try to move toward the chalice, which risks upsetting it.

(3) Speak your name aloud so the priest can hear it; this way, the priest can prayerfully commune you by name (even if the priest knows you, he may forget in the midst of the Liturgy!)

(4) Open your mouth - WIDE! This may sound obvious, but in the process of receiving the Holy Mysteries it is often forgotten, making it difficult for the Holy Mysteries to be safely delivered to the mouth of the communicant.

(5) If there is no subdeacon or acolyte to hold the communion cloth, be sure to hold it wide, right under your chin, in order to catch any of the Holy Mysteries which might accidentally fall. Wipe your lips with the