

IX. C. CELEBRATING FIRST COMMUNION

Sundays during the Easter Season are regarded as the most fitting time to celebrate First Communion. When this is not possible Sundays of Ordinary Time are also appropriate. Since sacraments are parish celebrations the Mass for First Communion should be in the parish of the candidate and family during a regularly scheduled Mass.

When preparing the liturgy for First Communion keep in mind that this is a celebration of a Sacrament of Initiation. The entire tone of the celebration should reflect this initiatory process. The celebrations of sacraments are whole parish events. The focus is the celebration of the whole Church gathered to celebrate the sacrament, rather than just the candidates.

Those who are receiving communion for the first time have a unique role. They participate fully in this and every other Eucharist by taking part in the singing, the spoken prayer, by listening to the scriptures and the liturgical texts spoken in their name by the presider and now receiving communion. Candidates should not be involved in liturgical roles or ministries such as lector, reader of intercessions, cantor, server or special Eucharistic minister. Those who normally fulfill these liturgical roles in the parish would be the best choice for the persons to serve in these capacities at the liturgy. The celebration of a sacrament allows the parish community to minister to those who are candidates for the sacrament.

Candidates for First Communion and their families are sometimes included in the Entrance Procession. The purpose of the procession is to help unify the assembly and to draw those already in place into the action of gathering for the celebration. There is no liturgical requirement that the candidates or families be in the Entrance Procession. If the candidates and their families are included in the procession, they should have the necessary programs or hymnals that allow them to participate in the singing of the entrance hymn.

The Procession with the Gifts can include some of the candidates bringing the bread and wine to the altar. Keep in mind that there should be an attempt to have only one plate of bread and one cup of wine brought to the altar. The bread and wine should not be divided into smaller vessels merely to increase the number of persons in the procession. It is possible to have a number of persons in the procession to present the gifts, but not all are required to have something in hand. It would be appropriate to include gifts of food for the poor in the procession if desired. However, only the gifts of bread and wine, the collection and food for the poor are appropriate.

The recessional or procession at the end of the celebration does not fulfill any liturgical function or need. Its purpose is to help the ministers in the sanctuary leave with a sense of order and dignity. It is not necessary to have everyone who was in the Entrance Procession included in the recessional. Whether those who have received First Communion and their families should or should not be in the recessional is optional.

Helping the candidates know what to expect when receiving Eucharist, both the bread and the wine, will enable them to be more relaxed and participate more fully in the sacrament

celebration. Tasting the bread and wine and rehearsing how to receive the consecrated bread and how to drink from the cup are helpful to ensure a prayerful celebration. Practice is important, but **do not over practice**.

First Communion is celebrated at the Sunday Liturgy. There is no special ritual beyond this. The Church understands that First Communion is the first of many receptions of the body and blood of the Lord, and is what these candidates will now celebrate for the rest of their lives. The liturgical season lends its color, texture and tone to the celebration. For additional information refer to Section III on Parish Celebrations, Liturgical Text to be Used, Ministries and Roles, Music and Catholic Worship, Art and Environment, and Photography.