



A letter from the pastor...

Dear Parishioners:

Just a few liturgical notes this week as we begin the new year. We are a ritual church that worships with and through signs. Rituals help you and me pray and free us to raise our minds and souls to God. They help our bodies to be part of the prayer by posture, sounds of singing, etc.

But they can be a danger as well. We can make rituals too mechanical and forget their true purpose. Rituals should always be intentional and point us to the deeper Truth. Most likely this is not sinful, but we do lessen our ability to pray the liturgy as fully as we ought. In liturgy as well as in life, our best quality can become our worst quality.

Every so often someone asks me about gluten free hosts for communion. First, a bit of background, during our long history some have questioned what elements could be used properly for communion. Some from the East wondered whether rice could be used since it was so common and a bit attuned to the culture.

Mother Church ALWAYS insisted the proper elements were wheat and wine from grapes. Science discovered that some people can be highly allergic to the gluten found in wheat. It made reception of the Eucharist very difficult for some. New liturgical rules allowed people to receive the Precious Blood which allowed persons to receive the Eucharist without the side effects of the allergy to gluten.

Several tried to find ways to make the hosts without gluten, but the Church requires wheat. Some religious developed hosts that are 99.9% gluten free. Many of our parishioners avail themselves of this practice. Our Church recognizes that accommodation is important.

Some, however, who do not need to use the accommodation do so anyway — somewhat like one who uses the handicap parking spaces when not necessary. No one is going to ask whether you should change which station you use for communion but I'd ask you to consider seriously if you have no allergy to gluten to receive the whole wheat host. But, if you need the low-gluten host continue to do so.

I also encourage you to receive both species (bread and wine) at communion. Jesus said, *Take and eat* and, *Take and drink*. It is not necessary to receive both the Precious Body and Blood, for either one is sufficient. Receiving under both species is a *fuller liturgical* sign of Jesus' command. I believe the more fully we are engaged in the liturgical action the more deeply God can touch our hearts.

Speaking of liturgical action, one should not genuflect or make the sign of the cross right after you receive the Eucharist. You have the True Presence in your very body and further signs of worship are not needed. It behooves us to return to the pew and contemplate on the True Presence within you. Receiving Jesus and then leaving Mass immediately is always a lesser route to take.

I invite every family to build some home rituals as well. A simple ritual is having a basket near the dinner table and everyone placing their cell phone in the basket at meal time. No one needs to answer their phone when the family sits for a meal. If perhaps it is the Pope on the line, it's OK to take the call. **Make your dinner table a smartphone/electronic free zone.**

Jewish homes have a mezuzah on the door frame as you enter the house and even rooms inside the house. We Catholics could put a crucifix on the door frame as you leave the room or home. The crucifix can remind us to carry Jesus with us and be mindful of our actions. I remember that my grandmother's house had a small holy water font in each room. Either of these would work as a home ritual reminding you and me of God in our lives. [Always carry a rosary in your pocket / purse. You never know when you'll need it]

You may know of other types of Catholic rituals you could implement in your family. While other family members may choose not to join in, you can still have these rituals without others joining. Using care and building intentional actions, not only in our churches, but in our homes, our cars, etc. remind oneself of God's presence.

Rituals are a great tool to help us grow in wisdom, age and grace. Use them well and intentionally.

Pace – bene,

Msgr. William L. Young, III | Pastor