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Chicago Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, right, celebrates Mass at Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago Ju

Chicago Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, right, celebrates Mass at Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago June 30, 2024. Cupich is calling for faithful to receive holy Communion standing -- the normative posture established by the U.S. Catholic bishops -- as part of a renewed awareness of the theology of the Communion procession, which symbolizes the unity of the body of Christ as it partakes of the central mystery of the Catholic faith. (OSV News photo/Simone Orendain)

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December 18, 2024

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Cardinal Blase J. Cupich of Chicago is advocating for Catholic faithful to receive holy Communion standing — the normative posture established by the U.S. Catholic bishops — as part of a renewed awareness of the theology of the Communion procession. He said the Communion procession symbolizes the unity of the body of Christ as it partakes of the central mystery of the Catholic faith.

Cupich in a Dec. 11 column for Chicago Catholic, the newspaper of the Archdiocese of Chicago wrote that "receiving the Eucharist is not a private action but rather a communal one, as the very word 'communion' implies."

He said, "For that reason, the norm established by the Holy See for the universal church and approved by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is for the faithful to process together as an expression of their coming forward as the Body of Christ and to receive Holy Communion standing."

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal allows a given country's conference of bishops to determine both the posture used for the reception of holy Communion and the act of reverence (such as a bow) that should precede it. The USCCB states that in the U.S., holy Communion is to be received either in the hand or on the tongue while "standing, unless an individual member of the faithful wishes to receive Communion while kneeling."

At the same time, the USCCB — citing canon law, GIRM and the 2004 Vatican instruction "Redemptionis Sacramentum" — notes that holy Communion cannot be denied to a baptized, properly disposed Catholic simply because he or she wishes to receive the sacrament while kneeling.

Although not specifically naming the practice of kneeling to receive holy Communion, Cupich stressed that "nothing should be done to impede" any of the liturgy's processions, "particularly the one that takes place during the sacred Communion ritual.

"Disrupting this moment only diminishes this powerful symbolic expression, by which the faithful in processing together express their faith that they are called to become the very Body of Christ they receive," he wrote.

The cardinal pointed to the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, stating that "it is significant that the council fathers decided that their first document should take up the topic of restoring the way we worship." He also referred to the ancient maxim "lex orandi, lex credendi" ("the law of prayer is the law of belief"), which refers to the view that the norms for prayer and belief are connected.

Processions themselves "have been part of the liturgy from the earliest days of Christian practice," noted Cupich.

Whether entrance, offertory, Communion or recessional, processions "give us a sensible experience of what it means to be a pilgrim people, helping us keep in mind that we are making our way together to the fullness of the heavenly banquet Christ has prepared for us," he said.

"Certainly reverence can and should be expressed by bowing before the reception of Holy Communion, but no one should engage in a gesture that calls attention to oneself or disrupts the flow of the procession," said Cupich. "That would be contrary to the norms and tradition of the church, which all the faithful are urged to respect and observe."

In his message, Cupich underscored the theological and spiritual foundations of Vatican II's liturgical reforms, which he said were not "a mere updating of our liturgy to fit the times we live in, as if it were a kind of liturgical facelift."

He said that "the bishops at the council made clear that the renewal of the liturgy in the life of the church is central to the mission of proclaiming the Gospel."

"We need the restoration of the liturgy because it gives us the capacity to proclaim Christ to the world. Thus ... the council called for the full, active and conscious participation of all the baptized in the celebration of the Eucharist to reflect our belief that in the sacred liturgy the faithful become the Body of Christ that they receive."