

Kneeling For Holy Communion Must Catholics Stand?

Many Catholics are asking the question. The Holy See has already answered— emphatically. In these responses to individuals the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments clarifies the mind of the legislator, the Holy Father, in promulgating the Roman Missal and the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, including any national adaptations confirmed by the Holy See. Identifying information has been removed, as indicated by the Xs in the text.

Congregatio de Cultu Divino et Disciplina

Sacramentorum

Prot. n. xxxx/02/L

xx July 2002

Your Excellency,

This Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has recently received reports of members of the faithful in your Diocese being refused Holy Communion unless while standing to receive, as opposed to kneeling. The reports state that such a policy has been announced to parishioners. There were possible indications that such a phenomenon might be somewhat more widespread in the Diocese, but the Congregation is unable to verify whether such is the case. This Dicastery is confident that Your Excellency will be in a position to make a more reliable determination of the matter, and these complaints in any event provide an occasion for the Congregation to communicate the manner in which it habitually addresses this matter, with a request that you make this position known to any priests who may be in need of being thus informed.

The Congregation in fact is concerned at the number of similar complaints that it has received in recent months from various places, and considers any refusal of Holy Communion to a member of the faithful on the basis of his or her kneeling posture to be a grave violation of one of the most basic rights of the Christian faithful, namely that of being assisted by their Pastors by means of the Sacraments (*Codex Iuris Canonici*, canon 213).

In view of the law that "sacred ministers may not deny the sacraments to those who opportunely ask for them, are properly disposed and are not prohibited by law from receiving them" (Canon 843 s. 1), there should be no such refusal to any Catholic who presents himself for Holy Communion at Mass, except in cases presenting a danger of grave scandal to other believers arising out of the person's unrepented public sin or obstinate heresy or schism, publicly professed or declared. Even where the Congregation has approved of legislation denoting standing as the posture for Holy Communion, in accordance with the adaptations permitted to the Conferences of Bishops by the Institution *Generalis Missalis Romani* n. 160, paragraph 2, it has done so with the stipulation that communicants who choose to kneel are not to be denied Holy Communion on these grounds.

In fact, as His Eminence, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger has recently emphasized, the

practice of kneeling for Holy Communion has in its favor a centuries-old tradition, and it is a particularly expressive sign of adoration, completely appropriate in light of the true, real and substantial presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ under the consecrated species.

Given the importance of this matter, the Congregation would request that Your Excellency inquire specifically whether this priest in fact has a regular practice of refusing Holy Communion to any member of the faithful in the circumstances described above and—if the complaint is verified—that you also firmly instruct him and any other priests who may have had such a practice to refrain from acting thus in the future. Priests should understand that the Congregation will regard future complaints of this nature with great seriousness, and if they are verified, it intends to seek disciplinary action consonant with the gravity of the pastoral abuse.

Thanking Your Excellency for your attention to this matter and relying on your kind collaboration in its regard,

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Jorge A. Cardinal Medina Estévez
Prefect

Francesco Pio Tamburrino
Archbishop Secretary

Congregatio de Cultu Divino et Disciplina Sacramentorum

Prot. n. xxxx/02/L
xx July 2002

Dear Xxxx,

This Congregation for Divine Worship gratefully acknowledges receipt of your letter, regarding an announced policy of denial of Holy Communion to those who kneel to receive it at a certain church.

It is troubling that you seem to express some reservations about both the propriety and the usefulness of addressing the Holy See regarding this matter. Canon 212 s.2 of the *Code of Canon Law* states that "Christ's faithful are totally free to make known their needs, especially their spiritual ones, and their desire: to the Pastor of the Church." The canon then continues in s.3: "According to their own knowledge competence and position, they have the right, and indeed sometimes the duty, to present to the sacred Pastor; their opinions regarding those things that pertain to the good of the Church." Accordingly, in consideration of the nature of the problem and the relative likelihood that it might or might not be resolved on the local level, every member of the faithful has the right of recourse to the Roman Pontiff either personally or by means of the Dicasteries or Tribunals of the Roman Curia.

Another fundamental right of the faithful, as noted in canon 213, is "the right to receive assistance by the sacred Pastors from the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the word of God and the Sacraments." In view of the law that "sacred" ministers may not deny the sacraments to those who opportunely ask for them, are properly disposed and are not prohibited by law from receiving them" (Canon 843

s.1), there should be no such refusal to any Catholic who presents himself for Holy Communion at Mass, except in cases presenting a danger of grave scandal to other believers arising out of the person's unrepented public sin or obstinate heresy or schism, publicly professed or declared. Even where the Congregation has approved of legislation denoting standing as the posture for Holy Communion, in accordance with the adaptations permitted to the Conferences of Bishops by the Institution *Generalis Missalis Romani* n. 160, paragraph 2, it has done so with the stipulation that communicants who choose to kneel are not to be denied Holy Communion on these grounds.

Please be assured that the Congregation takes this matter very seriously, and is making the necessary contacts in its regard. At the same time, this Dicastery continues to be ready to be of assistance if you should need to contact it again in the future.

Thanking you for your interest, and with every prayerful good wish, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Mons. Mario Marini
Undersecretary

**Congregatio de Culto Divino et Disciplina
Sacramentorum**

Prot. N. xxxx/02/L
Rome, xx February, 2003

Dear _____:

This Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has received your letter dated xx December 2002, related to the application of the norms approved by the Conference of Bishops of the United States of America, with the subsequent *recognitio* of this Congregation, as regards the question of the posture for receiving Holy Communion.

As the authority by virtue of whose *recognitio* the norm in question has attained the force of law, this Dicastery is competent to specify the manner in which the norm is to be understood for the sake of a proper application. Having received more than a few letters regarding this matter from different locations in the United States of America, the Congregation wishes to ensure that its position on the matter is clear.

To this end, it is perhaps useful to respond to your inquiry by repeating the content of a letter that the Congregation recently addressed to a Bishop in the United States of America from whose Diocese a number of pertinent letters had been received. The letter states: "... while this Congregation gave the *recognitio* to the norm desired by the Bishops' Conference of your country that people stand for Holy Communion, this was done on the condition that communicants who choose to kneel are not to be denied Holy Communion on these grounds. Indeed, the faithful should not be imposed upon nor accused of disobedience and of acting illicitly when they kneel to receive Holy Communion."

This Dicastery hopes that the citation given here will provide an adequate answer to

your letter. At the same time, please be assured that the Congregation remains ready to be of assistance if you should need to contact it again.

With every prayerful good wish, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Mons. Mario Marini
Undersecretary

Answered by Colin B. Donovan, STL

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