



Ask, Father James:

"How should I receive holy communion? On the tongue or in the hand?"

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The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM)*, the official instruction of the Catholic Church on how to celebrate Mass, states: “The communicant ... receives the Sacrament either on the tongue or, where this is allowed, and if the communicant so chooses, in the hand” (#161, emphasis added).

The Catholic Church for many centuries has the tradition of receiving holy communion on the tongue because it expresses the Faithful's reverence for the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of the Lord which is not just sharing in ‘ordinary bread and wine.’ However, there is documentary evidence that the early church also allowed holy communion on the hand. It was said that St. Cyril of Jerusalem (around AD 350), often gave support to reception in the hand: saying, “placing thy left hand as a throne for thy right, which is to receive so great a King ... receive the body of Christ.”

The norm for the Universal Church remains Communion on the tongue. In Canada, the Canadian bishops got an *indult from Rome*, (a special exception from the norms) which allows anyone to choose either to receive holy Communion either on the tongue or in the hand.

In March of 2018, in a general audience at the Vatican, Pope Francis clarified this question thus; “According to the ecclesial practice,” “the faithful approach the Eucharist normally in the form of a procession and receive Communion standing or on the knees, as determined by the Episcopal Conference, receiving the Sacrament in the mouth or, where allowed, in the hand, as preferred.” The pontiff also explained that “as we process to receive Communion, in reality it is Christ who comes to meet us and assimilate us to himself.

Pope Francis concluded by saying; And after Communion, “in order to ‘guard’ the received gift in our hearts, silent prayer is helpful. Lengthening this moment of silence, speaking with Jesus in our hearts is very helpful, as might also be singing a psalm or a joyful hymn.”