

LITURGY CORNER: Why do we do that?

PART TWO: Processing to the Altar

It may seem that when we enter the Communion procession it is to get from the pew to the altar, simply a movement from Point A to Point B. That's part of it, but more is happening. It is liturgy—filled with symbols and meaning. Yes, it is a line of people moving toward the ministers to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. It is also true that every liturgy can be experienced as a rehearsal for the journey to the heavenly banquet, a communion of saints on earth and in heaven. So who belongs in procession?

When we gather for Mass, we are a community of believers; we are the body of Christ. The communion procession is an action of the body of Christ. We are called to the feast. We are invited to leave our pews and join the communion procession that leads to the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ. The procession, although comprised of many, is really one. We are called to be fed, to be nourished, to be given strength for the journey. From the Eucharist, we are given the great commission. We process to the table to receive the Body and Blood of Christ knowing we agree to *become* the Body and Blood of Christ. Our renovation included the imagery on the altar panels of the corporal works of mercy, a clear connection to show that Eucharist is about going forth into the world.

Some cannot or do not join the procession but remain in their pews:

- Those in the RCIA, Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, a process by which adults become members of the Catholic Church through formation which leads to reception of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil.
- Those in CMI, Children's Ministry of Initiation, an adapted process of RCIA for children age seven years and older.
- Young children who have not yet received First Communion.
- Alienated Catholics, those attending Mass but not receiving Communion, for various personal reasons.
- Christians outside union with the Catholic faith.

(If you do not believe as we believe that this *is* the Body and Blood of Christ, we do not require you to accept that belief. Though we struggle with separation as Christians of one baptism, the altar is not an open table. Our oneness at the altar shows our union with the Church.)

We pray always for those who desire and yearn to receive the Eucharist.

At times, young children must accompany their parents in the procession. They watch what is going on and with child-like wonder ask when they will get some. This is a real opportunity to talk about our faith, what we believe, who comes to the table and why. Although there is no formal instruction to do this, some children who cannot receive Communion approach the minister with arms crossed, a gesture asking for a blessing. Though this may be the practice in some parishes, it is not part of our instruction for lay Eucharistic Ministers. This is not to be inhospitable, nor do we encourage snubbing anyone. It is simply to say that the communion procession is for communicants. We will do our best to respond with charity and friendliness. It is understandable that an infant or young child cannot be left in the pew, take them along. Help us to teach our children the purpose of the Communion procession and assure them we anticipate eagerly the day they will join us. Let them know that at the end of Mass, we are *all* blessed by the priest. With words of dismissal, the deacon sends us forth to live the gospel. We never leave unchanged. We now have a fire, or at the very least an ember burning in our hearts, to do what Jesus would do – in our homes, in our community, in the world. God's promise to us – I will be strength for the journey.

The Liturgy Board
