

## FIRST COMMUNION

### 1. Candidates for First Communion

Children baptized in the Catholic Church who have reached the age of reason (seven years of age) are invited to receive Communion. In general, this invitation is extended to children in grade two.

### 2. Preparation for First Communion

It is the responsibility of the pastor and the parents to ensure that children are adequately prepared for the reception of the Eucharist. It is the duty of the parish priest to ensure that those children who are not properly disposed do not come to Communion. (Can. 914).

A certificate of Baptism is to be obtained by the parish priest in every case, prior to beginning preparation for First Communion.

Foundational catechesis is most often provided by the teacher in a Catholic school or by a parish catechist. The Year 2 catechetical resource in the *Born of the Spirit Series: We Belong to the Lord Jesus*, provides a comprehensive overview of the Mass. Other resources may also be used by parish catechists. Some parishes provide an additional program of sacramental preparation for children, which may include parental involvement.

It is customary for parish priests (and teachers or catechists) to provide parents with information regarding the catechesis of their children and sacramental preparation. This often takes place in the context of parish meetings with parents.

Liturgical preparation includes the child's regular participation at Sunday Mass, the rehearsal of common responses and songs, the ritual for receiving Communion in a reverent manner, and any ministerial roles which the children will assume during the First Communion liturgy.

First Reconciliation: Children are to be prepared for the sacrament of Reconciliation and an opportunity to celebrate this sacrament is to be provided prior to First Communion.

### 3. Time of First Communion

The celebration of First Communion ideally takes place at Sunday Mass once the children have completed their preparation and the pastor deems them to be sufficiently disposed.

In accord with the long tradition of the Church, First Communion is usually celebrated during the Easter season at a regularly scheduled Sunday Mass. Where pastoral circumstances make this impossible, another suitable date may be chosen.

#### **4. Place of First Communion**

First Communion is to be celebrated in the parish church where the child resides or where his/her family is registered. If First Communion is to be celebrated in another church, permission of the child's proper pastor is required.

#### **5. Liturgy for First Communion**

The Entrance Procession takes place as usual. The procession is led by the cross bearer and acolytes. A minister carrying the Book of the Gospels follows. According to parish custom, other ministers may also take part in the procession, including the children who will receive the Eucharist for the first time during the celebration.

During the procession a song is sung by the entire assembly. The song should be familiar to all, possess a strong rhythmic quality and engage both the children and the adults who have gathered for the celebration. Generally, the opening song should be part of the parish repertoire.

Seating: Children are to be seated with the family members who are presenting them for this sacrament of Christian initiation. It will be helpful for the parish staff to establish a seating plan prior to the celebration so that adequate seating is provided for the children and their families.

Introductory rites: When all are in place and the song is concluded, the remaining introductory rites are celebrated. The Directory for Masses With Children (no. 40) makes provision for abbreviated introductory rites, suitable for children. These rites always conclude with the opening prayer.

Proclamation of the Word: The Liturgy of the Word is celebrated in the usual way. It is important that the Scriptures be proclaimed by those who have been trained to do so. The readings of the Sunday are used. A minister proclaims the first reading from the Old Testament (except during the Easter season when the reading is from the Acts of the Apostles). After a period of silence, all sing the responsorial psalm. A second minister then proclaims the New Testament reading. After a period of silence all stand and sing the gospel acclamation. The music chosen for the acclamation should be both festive and

well-known. Then the Gospel is proclaimed by the priest or deacon, and the homily is given. Children, parents and others may take part in a dialogue as part of the homily.

Depending on pastoral circumstances, it may be appropriate to proclaim only two, or even one of the three Scripture readings assigned for Sunday (see: Directory for Masses with Children, no. 42). However, the Gospel is never omitted.

Profession of Faith: The profession of faith follows the homily. It is recommended that the Apostles' Creed be used. In some communities, the children are invited to gather at the baptismal font to renew their baptismal promises in the presence of the community. At the conclusion of the renewal of promises they may sign themselves with baptismal water. This serves to place the celebration of First Communion more firmly in the context of Christian initiation.

Prayer of the Faithful: The intercessions may be announced by a minister or by children, according to parish custom. However, care is to be taken that the intercessions include prayers for the Church, civil leaders, those in need and the local community. The response to the petitions may be sung.

Presentation of Gifts: Following the intercessions, all are seated and the altar is prepared for the Eucharist. According to parish custom, family members may place the cloth on the altar, and bring forward flowers and candles to adorn the altar. Others may bring forward the bread and wine as well as the collection or gifts for the poor. Instrumental music or a song may accompany this rite.

Eucharistic Prayer: The Eucharistic prayer is the high point of the entire celebration. One of the three Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children, with its additional sung acclamations, may be proclaimed by the priest. It is important that the entire assembly is familiar with the sung acclamations by which they participate in the prayer. It is not appropriate to invite children and their families to gather around the altar during the Eucharistic prayer. The assembly's view of the altar and their attention to the words of the Eucharistic prayer are never to be obscured.

Communion Rite: Children who are receiving Communion for the first time may be invited to come forward with their families at the beginning of the Communion procession. The children are always to receive their first Communion from the priest. Where it is the custom in the parish to offer Communion under both forms to the assembly, children may receive

from the cup, provided that their parents are in agreement and the children have been instructed how to receive Communion from the cup.

Following Communion the children and their families are to be encouraged to return to their places and join in the singing of the Communion processional song. When all have received Communion, they observe a period of silent prayer. Then they stand for the prayer after communion. It is never appropriate for the children or others to perform a song during this period of silence.

Concluding Rite: The concluding rite of the Mass is celebrated in the usual way. Parish announcements may be made, and a solemn blessing may be given. Then all are dismissed.

## **6. Other Aspects of the Celebration**

Dress: The children ought to be dressed in a way that is appropriate for a Sunday celebration according to the wishes and customs of their families. Expensive and elaborate clothing is neither necessary nor desirable. During the celebration children ought not to be carrying rosaries or special prayer books (or wearing gloves). They should be able to participate fully in the celebration.

Participation Booklets: In most communities, the parish hymnal provides what is needed to ensure the participation of all present for the celebration. However, if a special booklet is needed or desired, care must be taken to obtain copyright permission for all prayer texts and songs that are to be included.

Photographs: Photographs or videos are not permitted during the liturgy, so that all may participate fully in the celebration. In most parishes an opportunity for pictures is provided following the celebration.

Mementoes and Certificates: Some parishes have the custom of distributing religious articles or certificates as part of the celebration of First Communion. The distribution of such items should not take place during Mass. This may be done following the celebration or at another time.

**7. First Communion Register Entries** The celebration of First Communion is to be recorded in parish register of First Communions. No notation needs to be made in the baptismal register of the child.

**8. Special Needs Children**

Baptized children who are developmentally disabled have the same rights as all baptized persons and ought to be invited to celebrate First Communion, provided they are suitably catechized and are able to understand that the bread and wine of the Eucharist is the body and blood of Christ. Wherever possible, the catechesis for these children should be a joint effort between the parish, home and school. Modifications to the catechetical program and sacramental preparation may be necessary because of the special needs and abilities of these children.