

Cardinal Blase J. Cupich
'As we pray ...' – Chicago Catholic
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We all have benefited from the renewal of the church ushered in by the Second Vatican Council. This gathering of the world's Catholic bishops and heads of religious orders of men took place in four sessions from 1962 to 1965.

Sixteen documents related to church renewal were eventually issued, but it is significant that the council fathers decided that their first document should take up the topic of restoring the way we worship. They took seriously the ancient maxim "lex orandi, lex credenda," a phrase often associated with Prosper of Aquitaine, a fifth-century Christian writer. It simply means that the law of praying establishes the law of believing.

By recognizing this relationship between how we worship and what we believe, 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. It would be a mistake to reduce the renewal to a mere updating of our liturgy to fit the times we live in, as if it were a kind of liturgical facelift. We need the restoration of the liturgy because it gives us the capacity to proclaim Christ to the world.

Thus, for instance, 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.

Our ritual for receiving of Holy Communion has special significance in this regard. It reminds us that receiving the Eucharist is not a private action but rather a communal one, as the very word "communion" implies. For that reason, the norm established by 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.

It is important to recall that processions have been part of the liturgy from the earliest days of Christian practice. They 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. This is why we process into the church, process up to bring the gifts, process to receive Holy Communion and process out at the end of Mass to carry the Lord into the world.

Nothing should be done to impede any of these 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. 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. That would be contrary to the norms and tradition of the church, which all the faithful are urged to respect and observe.

The law of praying establishes the law of believing is our tradition. When the bishops took up the task of restoring the liturgy six decades ago, they reminded us that this ancient principle enjoys a privileged place in the church's tradition. It should continue to guide us in every age.