

Wine more hygienic than host

Q. I've read that distribution of holy Communion under forms is the norm here in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, but I hesitate to receive Communion from the cup. Shouldn't I be worried about the transmission of germs?

A. This response is addressed to both communicants and to ministers of holy Communion. The church teaches us that receiving the body and blood of Christ under both kinds is the fuller sign. But many people pass the cup by because they have the same fear about the issues of hygiene.

You may be surprised to learn that it is far less hygienic to receive under the form of bread. Think about what usually happens. The minister gives consecrated bread to a communicant. Their fingers touch the hand of the other person, perhaps even their tongue. Where do those fingers go? Straight back into the ciborium/bowl/paten. Where do the pathogens go? Everywhere.

And here comes the next consecrated bread, covered with germs. ... And where have all those hands been recently? On the pew in front of them, blowing noses and most recently exchanging the sign of peace with other hands in a similar condition. It's a great idea for ministers to use a hand sanitizer, as unobtrusively as possible, please.

There are medical studies that have now found that we have an enzyme in our saliva which kills off viruses such as AIDS as soon as it encounters it, which means that a healthy person cannot get AIDS from communicating under the form of wine. However, a person with AIDS, whose immune system is down, is certainly at risk of catching something life-threatening from any pathogens which may (remote possibility) be left on the cup after the minister has carried out the five-fold procedure outlined below.

For the rest of us, the precious metal of the cup (when used), plus the antiseptic quality of the wine itself, plus the wiping, the new piece of cloth and the turning, mean that it is very difficult to catch something from receiving Communion from the cup. Obviously, anyone with a heavy cold or illness should not receive from the cup. Actually, out of respect for the community, those with heavy colds or worse

shouldn't be present in the church at all. Nevertheless, we've survived all that for almost 2,000 years.

Here's what all ministers of holy Communion should do:

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