

28th Sunday - Cycle B 2009+

Wisdom 7:7-11; Hebrews 4:12-13; Mark 10:17-30 (cf. also CCC par. 2052 ff.)

Having entered the flu season our bishop, along with many other leaders in the church have asked to consider a few of the ritual practices of our liturgy; specifically the issue of exchanging the sign of peace, and sharing from the common cup.

Let me begin my remarks by stating clearly that it is not a sin to miss mass when you are ill. If you are ill please stay home and take care of yourself. This will also help to prevent from giving whatever you have to others. This draws our attention to another important consideration. Avoiding the flu should not be seen as a shunning or staying away from people who are sick. It is about protecting yourself against infection. Listen to the medical professionals and wash your hands frequently. Sneeze or cough into your elbow. If you are sick be courteous by staying away from others.

Here at Nativity we have had the longstanding custom of receiving communion under both forms of bread and wine. It is important to note that for many centuries no one was allowed to receive the precious blood except the clergy. It has been the teaching of the Church that to receive only the body, or only the blood, is to receive the fullness of communion. One is not obligated to receive both the body and the blood.

Receiving the blood of Christ, however, has become a very important spiritual act for many people. For this reason we will continue to offer the common cup here at Nativity. However, if you have cold or flu symptoms we ask you, out of courtesy to others, please do not take from the cup until the symptoms have subsided. Further, if you feel uncomfortable receiving from the cup during the flu season please refrain for the time being.

The other issue to address has to do with physical contact. Several times during the liturgy we are encouraged to greet one another. During these next few months we ask you to consider a couple of options. In the beginning of mass we encourage you simply to turn and greet one another verbally, "Good morning," or "It's good to see you," or "How have you been" without actually shaking hands. If you do not know the person next to you it might be good to offer them your name at this time.

During the praying of the Lord's Prayer we have had the custom of holding hands. We invite you to consider a couple of other options. First, you may simply wish to fold your hands as you might in private prayer. Another consideration might be the "oranz" position, where you hold your hands extended outward in a gesture of openness to God. Again during the sign of peace we encourage you not to shake hands, but rather turn to each with the words "Peace be with you." You might even consider a bow towards each other as a gesture of venerating the presence of Christ within one another. Families might consider a hug instead of a handshake. Frequently people have spoken to me about why they do not extend a handshake to others during the sign of peace. Sometimes the person has been sick and they don't want to run

the risk of infecting other people. Other's, especially those who suffer from arthritis, find it physically painful to shake hands with others. So, if the person next to you doesn't extend their hand, please do not think of it is an offense to you. Instead simply exchange the blessing of peace. These few precautions should get us through the flu season while not stopping completely these important ritual actions. At the same time you might take the opportunity to reflect on the importance of these actions and what meaning they have for you in your faith. Then when we begin these actions again after the flu season you might have a deep appreciation for their place in our worship.