



June 3, 2026

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Each year, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ leads us to reflect more deeply on our participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice of the Lord and how that participation might profoundly influence our lives. This special day celebrates the great gift of the Most Blessed Sacrament by which Christ is present among us and through which we are united to Him and one another. During our earthly lives, sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ yields the richest and most intimate expression of communion with the Lord and the Church.

Throughout the Diocese of Harrisburg, I see great devotion afforded to the worship of the Eucharistic Mystery within and outside of Mass. Periods of Eucharistic adoration and perpetual adoration chapels draw so many of us to fall on our knees in prayer and gratitude. I am edified by the way in which so many of you receive Holy Communion with devotion and affection. Without a doubt, we reverently celebrate the presence of the Lord among us in this Holy Sacrament. Nevertheless, it is helpful to be reminded from time to time of a few aspects of our reception of Holy Communion.

I encourage you to receive Holy Communion regularly and worthily, that is, free of mortal sin and properly disposed to receive the graces that flow forth from this Sacrament. Each of us is called to take care not to be distracted, not only during Mass, but especially as we approach the altar of the Lord. The Communion procession leads us to the altar and should be accompanied by a prayerful disposition and outward participation in the Communion chant. Singing as we approach the Lord can help us to be sure our minds and hearts are prepared to receive Him with joy.

As you approach the moment of reception, whether receiving under the form of the Sacred Host or from the chalice, it is appropriate to make a proper gesture of a bow of the head prior to receiving Holy Communion. And, when the priest, deacon, or extraordinary minister announces, “The Body of Christ” or “The Blood of Christ,” respond with a firm and clear “Amen.” So much is contained in this one word! You are proclaiming your belief that Christ is truly present in the Most Blessed Sacrament. You are affirming that by this Sacrament you share in the life and are in communion with the Church. You accept with faith the grace poured out into your heart that, as Saint Augustine has said, makes us what we consume. It is necessary to respond, “Amen!”

According to the discipline of the Church, it is permissible to reverently receive Holy Communion either in the hand or on the tongue. But great care must be taken in both manners. With clean and uncovered hands, after creating a throne for the King of Heaven, one should consume the Sacred Host immediately before walking away from the minister and careful not to allow any particle to fall to the ground. For those who receive upon the tongue, hear the counsel of the Psalmist who tells us, “Open wide your mouth and I will fill it” (81:10).

It remains the law of the Church that reception follows an hour-long fast, knowing that only water and medicine may be received within the hour of Holy Communion. Any other food or drink, including coffee and gum, breaks the fast. Carefully adhering to the fast helps us to remember that this is no ordinary food or drink, but the Food of Heaven, the Bread of Angels, the very Body and Blood of the Lord Himself. Indeed, this immense gift of God's love nourishes us on our journey through this life. Pope Saint John Paul II said it best: "The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth. It is a glorious ray of the heavenly Jerusalem which pierces the clouds of our history and lights up our journey." Jesus wants us to realize that He is with us. His presence makes all the difference. In the Blessed Sacrament, He is with us hidden in the form of bread and wine. Let us strive to receive Him reverently and well.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Timothy C. Senior". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Timothy C. Senior
Bishop of Harrisburg