

As a pastor I receive ads for all kinds and manner of religious paraphernalia,
including these little devices for “germ free distribution of communion.”

As you can see, it’s shaped just like the little individual creamers
that arrive on the saucer on your coffee cup in some restaurants,
but this little container has two compartments:

- peel back the top seal and you find a little, round communion bread;
- peel back the next layer and the container is filled with wine.

The idea is to place several hundred of these on the altar
and then to distribute them at communion time,
with no other human hand but your own touching the bread and wine.

I’m glad that you’re laughing in astonishment!

There’s simply nothing Catholic about this method of distributing communion!

Consider the bread we use for the Eucharist:

it’s bread faithful to the image St. Paul uses in his letter to us this morning:

*Because the loaf of bread is one,
we, though many, are one body,
for we all partake of the one loaf.*

We have long been accustomed to small, round individual hosts,
each one perfect in its circular shape.

But those little hosts are unfaithful to Paul’s image of the one loaf,
and unfaithful to what Jesus asked us to do at the Last Supper.

Jesus “took bread, broke it, and gave it to his disciples...”

Indeed, in the early days of the church, and even now,
the Eucharist was and is referred to as “the breaking of bread.”

Just as Christ’s body was broken for us on the Cross,
just as his blood was shed for us on the Cross,
so at the table of his body and blood, we receive him
in bread, broken, and in wine poured out,
his divine presence shared among us in Communion.

In the early days of the church, people would have laughed at the idea
of pre-cut, individual pieces of bread for the eucharist!

Then how did we come to use such hosts in our prayer?

The answer is simple: efficiency!

Little hosts are easier to deal with -

and you don’t have to worry about sacred crumbs from the Eucharist.

Efficiency is how we moved from
breaking a loaf into pieces

(many becoming one in the one loaf)

to individual pre-cut hosts

(one piece per person, the original loaf, no where to be seen
because those pre-cut hosts were NEVER part of a larger one).

What did we lose in that transition?

In many ways, we lost our sense of the Eucharist
as Communion with each other in Christ
and centered on Communion as “my personal time with Jesus.”

Communion is, of course, my time with Jesus,
but first and foremost, it is OUR time with Jesus
and with our brothers and sisters who, with us,
form the Body of Christ which the Church community is.

The reason that the Church’s liturgy asks us to sing at Communion time
is to remind us that what we are doing at that time
is something we are doing together.

A song at Communion time does not interrupt anything,
but rather supports precisely the sacramental action we are celebrating:
the many are becoming one in sharing the broken loaf
of Christ’s body;
and the many are becoming one in sharing the cup of his blood.

Nor is this something new dreamed up Vatican Council II!
It was Christ himself who decided how he would remain present among us,
and how we would celebrate his presence after his death and resurrection.
He told us to do it this way: do this in memory of me...

In the desert, God fed his people, Israel, with manna from heaven.
In the Eucharist, God feeds us, his people, with bread from heaven and with the cup of salvation.

Most restaurants serve individual plated meals to individual diners;
some restaurants serve “family style.”
Jesus chose “family style” as the way he would feed his body and blood to us -
his body, the Church.

The gift of the eucharist is not only that Christ should desire an intimacy with us
so great that we are invited to consume him,
but also that he invites us to become what we eat, to become what we drink,
to become his presence in the world today.

Come to the Lord’s supper, then,
and know that he serves us “family style”
for the body we receive is the body we are
for we are the Body of Christ, the Church,
nourished by the body and blood of the One
whose body we are.

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