Hygiene at Mass: Concern for All - Genuine Hospitality

At times, people are concerned about the spread of illness when we gather for Eucharist. In 2009 the New Zealand Bishops reminded us:

> 'We Catholics have a deep love of the Mass. It is at the heart of our Catholic life, identity and practice.'
>
> When we gather in our churches each Sunday, we do so not as individuals, but as the Body of Christ, God's holy Church. It is as the sisters and brothers of Christ that we attune our ear to the Word of God that gives us life. It is as the sisters and brothers of Christ that we draw near to the Altar of the Lord to be nourished by his Body and Blood. It is as the sisters and brothers of Christ that we go forth to live what we proclaim. This is what we do as Catholics. This is who we are as Church. [1]

Also, as a people we care for the wellbeing of one another and are therefore reminded of the call to implement hygienic practices to safeguard the health of all, especially when viruses, colds and infections abound.

Minimising the Spread of Illnesses

As a faith community, let our best practice aim at incorporating the very best hygiene procedures to ensure that any risk of the spread of illnesses is kept to minimum. There are several measures we can take to safeguard the health of one another.

However, when suffering from infections that can quickly pass from one to another, it is advisable to stay at home.

Priests

- wash your hands thoroughly prior to Mass
- when "bowing slightly" (rubrics) to pray the prayers of consecration take care not to lean over and breathe on the Host and chalice
- place the elements out of direct line of the possibility of breath or spittle accidentally reaching them during the praying and singing of the Eucharistic prayer
- do not to touch the tongues or mouths of people receiving communion in that manner
- bless non-communicants in a manner that does not include signing them on the forehead or touching to ensure any oil or bacteria is not transferred to Hosts that the following people will receive.
- during outbreaks of flu and infections in the community, it can ease concerns within the congregation for them to see the priest cleanse his hands after blowing his nose and/or after giving the Sign of Peace prior to distributing Holy Communion

If you have any level of unwellness – it is advisable to stay home

- arrange for another priest to preside at Mass **OR** invite trained members of the congregation to lead the parish in the Liturgy of the Word with Holy Communion
- drink from a chalice that is not then shared with others
- use your own purificator

[1] On Actions in Relation to the Spread of Influenza A, NZCCB 2009.

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People: *If you have any level of unwellness – it is advisable to stay home*

- wash your hands prior to Mass
- use a handkerchief or tissue or mask for coughing or sneezing
- use handkerchief or tissue to blow your nose (wash your hands)
- if you are without handkerchief, tissue or mask, cough into the crook of your arm or sleeve to minimise the spread of germs. If you cough into your hands, wash immediately.
- if you usually receive on the tongue please receive on the hand if you have any unwellness
- refrain from receiving from the chalice
- refrain from holding people's hands

Sacristans *If you have any level of unwellness – it is advisable to stay home*

- wash hands thoroughly before handling any vessels and before Mass
- use vessels of impermeable material, preferably metal or metal lined
- thoroughly cleanse chalices and patens *before* Mass using hot water and detergent or Milton solution (as for babies' bottles) - cold water rinsing is not adequate
- put out freshly laundered and ironed purificators (heat and sunlight assist in sterilisation)

Extra Ordinary Ministers of Holy Communion *If you have any level of unwellness – it is advisable to stay home – let the parish know you are unwell*

- carry hand sanitiser with you. Before proceeding to the sanctuary rub sanitiser on your hands (dispensers and hand cleansing should not appear as a 'ritual' carried out in the sanctuary).
- unfold the purificator so you may use it all
- carefully and firmly wipe *inside and outside* the rim of the chalice
- turn the chalice slightly after each communicant
- use a fresh part of the purificator after each communicant
- do not allow purificator to touch anyone's lips
- bless non-communicants without touching them

The five-fold movement for giving Communion

1. Give (the cup to the communicant),
2. Move (the purifier to a different spot, while the communicant is receiving),
3. Take (back the cup),
4. Wipe (the rim on both sides, inside and out),
5. Turn (the cup a quarter turn)."

Exchanging a Sign of Christ's Peace

- some diseases are transferred by touch. Liturgy Committees are encouraged to consider how the Sign of Christ's Peace can be communicated without shaking hands. E.g.
  - looking directly at each person and extending the greeting verbally,
  - using a slight bow of the head as extending the greeting verbally...

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Genuine Hospitality

In a Christian community, it is important at all times that we show genuine hospitality towards each other. When communicable diseases are present in communities, it is important to respond with consideration towards others. This may mean we stay at home. It does mean we are all thorough in our hygiene practices. Frequent and thorough handwashing is important. Ensuring our mouth is covered when we sneeze or cough is also important.

Spiritual Communion

If you are unwell, **REMAIN AT HOME** and *make a spiritual Communion*. St Thomas Aquinas has defined this as "an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament [in Communion at Mass] and in lovingly embracing Him as if we had actually received Him." Compose yourself as you would at Mass, desire the Lord's presence in spirit, pray in thanksgiving for the gift of the Lamb of God, and receive the graces as if you had been able to partake in Holy Communion.

Summary

Implementing good hygiene is an act of love and hospitality to our sisters and brothers.

If a serious outbreak of illness occurs, the Bishops of Aotearoa New Zealand will introduce necessary liturgical adaptations for such an occasion.

Mass Online

Our Sunday Eucharist is something we participate in with others in our faith community. If you are unwell, however, and need to stay home, you can watch a celebration of the Sunday Mass at one of these websites
Watch the Sunday Mass online at one of these websites
Mass online https://mass-online.org/daily-holy-mass-live-online/
T he Sunday Mass https://thesundaymass.org/

Acknowledgment*: This article has drawn extensively on "Communion from the Cup and Hygiene – A policy statement from the Auckland Diocesan Liturgy Commission" in Liturgy Vol 22: Nos 3 & 4, 1997 (a publication of the Auckland Diocesan Liturgy Centre)*

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