

The Eucharistic Fast

What is the Eucharistic Fast?

This is the name given to the practice of fasting before communion. The norm is found in Canon Law No. 919.

How do we keep the Eucharistic fast?

Canon Law says “One who is to receive the Most Holy Eucharist is to abstain from any food or drink, with the exception only of water and medicine, for at least the period of **one hour** before Holy Communion.” (919.1)

Please note that this one hour is before receiving Holy Communion. For practical purposes, that means that if it takes 10 minutes to get to the church, you arrive right on time for Mass and the Liturgy of the Word takes about 30 minutes, there should be nothing to eat or drink (including gum because it is impossible not to swallow when chewing gum) for 20 minutes before leaving home.

Are there exceptions to this rule?

Yes. Those who are elderly, sick and those who care for them are exempt from this. So are priests who preside over more than one liturgy on a weekend.

Why do we fast before receiving Holy Communion?

There are two main reasons.

1. St. Augustine said it this way, “It has pleased the Holy Ghost (we say Spirit now) that, to honor so great a Sacrament, the Lord’s Body should enter the mouth of the Christian before other food.” In this way, the faithful show the reverence we owe to Jesus Christ for this great gift.
2. The second reason is that it fosters religious practices that keep us mindful of the gift of faith and the grace of the sacraments. The Church calls this the gift of piety. In very practical terms, this is what it means to “practice” the faith. Like any kind of practice, its immediate fruits may not be seen, but over time, the practice enriches the activity to which it is attached.