



Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls

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THE PURIFICATION OF SACRED VESSELS AFTER HOLY COMMUNION

Diocese of Sioux Falls

July 25, 2007

The Feast of St. James

I. Introduction

The source and summit of our Catholic Faith and life, the Most Holy Eucharist, contains the whole spiritual good of the Church, Christ Himself (cf. *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 274). “Jesus Christ is present in the Eucharist in a unique and incomparable way. He is present in a true, real and substantial way, with His Body and His Blood, with His Soul and His Divinity. In the Eucharist, therefore, there is present in a sacramental way, that is, under the Eucharistic species of bread and wine, Christ whole and entire, God and Man” (ibid, 282). This divine presence is worthy of our worship, wonder and awe, and the greatest respect. These are shown in a number of ways both during the celebration of Holy Mass, and outside of it.

One area in particular where this reverence is shown is in the use of Sacred Vessels. In addition to requiring that the solid materials of such Vessels be “truly noble ... so that honor will be given to the Lord by their use and all risk of diminishing the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharistic species in the eyes of the faithful will be avoided” (*Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 117), the Church provides norms for the Purification of the Sacred Vessels after Holy Communion. The Purification of Vessels is intimately linked to the offering of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Thus, the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* directs that the Sacred Vessels are to be purified by a priest, deacon, or instituted acolyte, who as ordinary ministers of Holy Communion have the responsibility to assure that the remains of the Holy Eucharist are reverently and appropriately disposed. (279).

It has become common to delegate to Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion this responsibility. The desire and dedication of those who volunteer to serve as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, including assisting in the purification of Vessels, is to be commended and sincerely appreciated. It cannot be denied, however, that, perhaps because of a lack of sufficient catechesis, a certain casualness has arisen concerning dress, language and attitude before the Mystery of the Divine Presence in the Most Holy Eucharist. For instance, sometimes the ministry of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion is referred to as the distribution of the bread or the wine. In fact, it is the distribution of the Body of Christ under the appearance of bread and the Blood of Christ under the appearance of wine. This casualness has led to some abuses, especially in how the Precious Blood that is not consumed by the faithful is

dealt with. Some have poured the Precious Blood into the drain of a sink or the sacrarium; neither of these is appropriate and both potentially have grave canonical consequences. As the *General Instruction* and the norms below make clear, the remains of the Precious Blood must be consumed.

II. History

Recognizing the common pastoral practice in the parishes of our country, in March of 2002 the bishops of the United States received an indult from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments to allow Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to purify Vessels after the distribution of Holy Communion at the discretion of the local bishop. This indult was granted for a five-year period *ad experimentum*. Consequently, in November of 2002, my predecessor, the Most Reverend Robert J. Carlson, gave this permission to the parishes and institutions of the Diocese of Sioux Falls.

The bishops of the United States sought an extension of that indult. In a letter dated October 17, 2006, Francis Cardinal Arinze, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, informed us that the request had been denied after having been brought personally to the attention of the Holy Father. As a result, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may no longer assist with the Purification of Sacred Vessels. Thus, it has become necessary to clarify the manner in which the Purification of the Vessels after Holy Communion is to be carried out within the Diocese of Sioux Falls to assure compliance with the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* and the *Instruction on the Eucharist, Redemptionis Sacramentum*.

III. Decree

The following norms and directives are hereby promulgated and are to be implemented no later than December 2, 2007, the First Sunday of Advent:

1. The Purification of Sacred Vessels is to be carried out at every Mass by the priest, an assisting priest, the deacon, or by a duly instituted acolyte. (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 279). In the Dioceses of the United States the ministry of instituted acolyte is primarily open to those preparing to receive Holy Orders.
2. When the distribution of Holy Communion is completed, the priest and deacon immediately and reverently consume at the altar all of the Blood of Christ that remains. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may consume the remains of the Precious Blood from their chalice of distribution, doing so at or near the altar.
3. The priest or deacon carries any consecrated hosts that remain to the place designated for the reservation of the Holy Eucharist. The priest or deacon collects the fragments, if any remain, from the paten or ciboria consuming them or wiping them into the Chalice. He then carries the Chalice and other Sacred Vessels to the credence table, where he purifies them and arranges them in the usual way. He may also purify at the altar (cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 182 and 183).
4. The Purification takes place in the following manner: After wiping the patens and any other ciboria over the chalice, water is poured into the Chalice and, if desired, over the fingers of the priest or deacon. After swirling the water around in the customary manner, it may be poured into the next chalice, and then into the next, etc. Finally, the ablution is

consumed after saying the words, “May I receive these gifts in purity of heart. May they bring me healing and strength, now and forever.”

5. For a large number of Sacred Vessels, it is permissible to wait until after Holy Mass has ended, rather than to purify them at the altar or the credence table during Holy Mass (cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 183; *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 119). In this case, the vessels are set on the credence table, suitably covered with an appropriately clean cloth. Then, after Mass, they may be purified at the credence table or taken to the sacristy where they are purified by either the priest after he has greeted the people, an assisting priest, the deacon, or in the absence of a deacon, by a duly instituted acolyte. The Purification takes place according to the directive above.
6. After they have been purified, whether during or after Holy Mass, the Vessels can and should be washed by the sacristan, an Extraordinary Minister of Communion, or other designated person. They should be stored in such a manner that befits the sacredness of such Vessels.

IV. Conclusion

These norms and directives encourage us to raise in our minds the importance of reverence shown to the Most Blessed Sacrament. They also offer the opportunity for proper catechesis, beginning with the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, both on what we believe and how we witness to what we believe by their implementation. These changes may especially challenge those who serve as pastors of several parishes. I ask for your understanding and cooperation, and reflection on when both species might be appropriately offered.

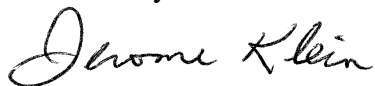
Norms and directives help assure that the Faith is properly celebrated and, therefore, passed on in its purity and totality. As our belief in the Most Holy Eucharist becomes more firm and our celebrations of Holy Mass become more devout, our lives will become more intensely lived in the presence of the Lord who walks among us, even today, on our way to everlasting life in His Kingdom. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Woman of the Eucharist, teach us true reverence and, thereby, help us to be men and women of the Eucharist (cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 94 and 96).

Given at the Catholic Pastoral Center, Sioux Falls, on July 25, 2007 by

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The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain
Bishop of Sioux Falls

Witnessed by



Mr. Jerome Klein
Chancellor