Archdiocese of New York Announces Reintroduction of the Distribution of the Precious Blood

The Archdiocese of New York has recently announced that, given the easing of restrictions associated with the COVID-19 public health emergency, the distribution of the Precious Blood may be reintroduced into parish Masses at the pastor’s discretion. This news presents an opportunity for parish communities to reflect on the spiritual meaning of this sacred action established by the Lord Himself, to offer Eucharistic catechesis to members of the faithful, and to refine parish liturgical practices in accordance with ecclesial norms.
The USCCB’s *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America* state that the Precious Blood has been distributed to the faithful since the earliest days of Christianity in fulfillment of Christ’s command to “take and eat... [and] take and drink” (6). This ancient practice was generally discontinued during the scholastic era after the turn of the first millennium, due, in part, to concerns over spillage of the Precious Blood. However, recognizing the importance of the effective use of signs within the celebration of the liturgy, and reflecting on the institution of the Eucharist within the context of a sacred meal, the Second Vatican Council called for the reintroduction of the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds in 1963’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosantum concilium*.

The current *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* [GIRM] offers a fine summary of the theology which undergirds this practice:

Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it takes place under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clearer expression is given to the Divine Will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the connection between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Kingdom of the Father (281).

Thus, the distribution of the Precious Blood underscores the nature of the Eucharist as spiritual food and drink given to sustain and build up the pilgrim Church on earth. This action also points to the eternal banquet of heaven, where all God’s people will “come from east and west, and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God” (Lk 13:29).
The General Instruction of the Roman Missal continues:

The diocesan bishop also has the faculty to allow Communion under both kinds, whenever it seems appropriate to the Priest to whom charge of a given community has been entrusted as [its] own pastor, provided that the faithful have been well instructed and there is no danger of the profanation of the Sacrament or that the rite would be difficult to carry out on account of the number of participants or for some other reason (283).

Here, the GIRM notes that it is necessary to provide proper catechesis to a parish community prior to introducing (or reintroducing) the distribution of the Precious Blood at Mass. Amongst the various matters to be presented, the USCCB’s Norms recommend giving special attention to the following:

- the ecclesial nature of the Eucharist as the means by which all the faithful are gathered into one Body in Christ;
- the Eucharist as the memorial of Christ’s sacrifice, his death and resurrection, and as the sacred banquet;
- the Real Presence of Christ in the eucharistic elements, whole and entire—in each element of consecrated bread and wine (the doctrine of concomitance);
- the kinds of reverence to be shown to the Eucharist, both during and outside of Mass; and
- the distinction between the roles of Ordinary and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.

Parishes that will reintroduce the practice of distributing the Precious Blood in the coming months will also want to be especially attentive to the following practical considerations and liturgical norms:

- In distributing the Precious Blood, a sufficient number of chalices should be prepared prior to Mass. Wine may be poured into these vessels from a common flagon, but this should occur during the Presentation of the Gifts, and never following the consecration in the Eucharistic Prayer.
• It is not necessary to place a small drop of water into each chalice, but only the principal chalice used by the priest-celebrant.

• When approaching the chalice, the communicant should bow as a sign of reverence and respond “Amen” to the words offered by the minister, “The Blood of Christ.” After the communicant has received the Precious Blood, the chalice should be wiped with a purificator and turned before presenting it to the next communicant.

• It always remains the choice of the communicant, not the minister, to receive from the chalice.

• While the preferred manner of distributing the Precious Blood is via the chalice, this may also take place through intinction in the (arch)dioceses of the United States. When distributing the Precious Blood in this manner, the priest should place the host in a chalice held by the deacon before saying to the communicant, “The Body and Blood of Christ.” Alternatively, it is possible to use a special set of vessels designed for intinction when there is not a deacon present, whereby a small chalice is placed in the center of a larger ciborium of hosts.

• It is not permitted for communicants to intinct the host themselves and then self-communicate, as this would detract from the sign value of being fed by the Lord in Holy Communion.

• The USCCB has indicated that the “excessive use of extraordinary ministers might in some circumstances constitute a reason either for limiting the distribution of Holy Communion under both species or for using intinction instead of distributing the Precious Blood from the chalice” (Norms, 24). As well, the Holy See has stated that “the chalice should not be ministered to lay members of Christ’s faithful where there is such a large number of communicants that it is difficult to gauge the amount of wine for the Eucharist... or where a notable part of the people continues to prefer not to approach the chalice for various reasons, so that the sign of unity would in some sense be negated” (Redemptionis Sacramentum, 102).

• Additional information and instructions on proper practice for distributing the Precious Blood may be found on the USCCB website.

The reintroduction of this practice in our archdiocesan parishes serves as an opportunity to reflect on the great gift of the Eucharist, the Real Presence of Christ Himself, to the People of God. Especially in this time of national Eucharistic revival, a renewed appreciation of, and devotion to Jesus, who makes Himself available to us in Holy Communion at every Mass, is a reminder to all of the love of Christ and His desire to remain with His People always.
Liturgical Q and A: Placement of Tabernacles

In response to the current national Eucharistic revival, Cardinal Dolan has recently encouraged archdiocesan pastors to consider moving the tabernacle in their parish church to the center of the sanctuary, where this is possible. This initiative is intended to emphasize the centrality of the Eucharist in the lives of the faithful and the entire parish community.

Following this announcement, the Liturgy Office has received some questions concerning why tabernacles were sometimes moved from the sanctuary to another location in the church in the years following the Second Vatican Council. While Vatican II’s Sacrosanctum concilium did not call for tabernacles to be relocated to a side altar or other space in parish churches, several other official ecclesiastical documents promulgated in the decades after the Second Vatican Council did encourage placing the tabernacle in a chapel that is separated from the body of the church, including the Sacred Congregation of Rites’ 1967 Instruction on Eucharistic Worship [Eucharisticum Mysterium], the first edition of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (1969), and the ritual book Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass (1973). In promoting the use of a Eucharistic chapel, these documents sought to create a distinct space that would be conducive to quiet prayer and adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Other statements of the period additionally maintained that the presence of a tabernacle in the sanctuary might become a distraction to the liturgical action at the altar during the celebration of Mass (cf. NCCB, Art and Environment in Catholic Worship, 78).

Beginning in the 1980’s, there was a noticeable shift in the guidance given by the Holy See on this issue, wherein the possibility of situating the tabernacle in the body of the church was placed on equal footing with the practice of reserving the Blessed Sacrament in a separate chapel. For example, the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship’s 1980 Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharist [Inaestimable donum] stated, “The tabernacle in which the Eucharist is kept can be located on an altar, or away from it, in a place in the church which is very prominent, truly noble and duly decorated, or in a chapel suitable for private prayer and for adoration by the faithful” (25). The most current edition of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal explicitly speaks of the possibility of placing the tabernacle in the sanctuary, on an old altar that is no longer used for the celebration of Mass (315). These developments in liturgical
legislation are likely a response to more recent concerns that many Catholics have lost an awareness of the Eucharistic presence of Christ in the tabernacle and an appreciation of the Eucharistic mystery, in general.

Irrespective of whether the tabernacle is placed in the sanctuary or a separate chapel, the current legislation clearly indicates that the tabernacle should be situated in a place that is “truly noble, prominent, conspicuous, worthily decorated, and suitable for prayer” (GIRM, 314). Furthermore, it is up to the judgement of the diocesan bishop to determine the location for the tabernacle in parish churches, “in accordance with the structure of each church and legitimate local customs” (Ibid).

In responding to the Cardinal’s recent initiative, parish communities that are considering moving their tabernacle to the center of the church are encouraged to consult with the archdiocesan Liturgy Office concerning any relevant factors involved in such a move, such as the size and arrangement of the other principal appointments in the sanctuary. As well, parishes should consider ways to prepare the faithful for this change, including, for example, a catechesis on the Eucharist via a preached parish mission, bulletin inserts, a series of homilies extending over several weeks, and special scheduled times of communal prayer before the exposed Blessed Sacrament.

**Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions Offers Weekly Presentations on the Mass**

As part of current efforts to support a Eucharistic revival in the United States, the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions has announced an ongoing series of webinars which will feature expert presenters, online chats, and downloadable handouts on the Mass. The FDLC webinars are designed to assist clergy, religious, and laity in rediscovering the beauty and power of the Eucharistic celebration, the summit and source of the Catholic faith. Each presentation will be offered at 1:00 pm on the dates listed below, in English, and will be 75 minutes in length. More information and registration may be found on the FDLC website.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>PRESENTER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 2</td>
<td>The Church at Prayer: The Introductory Rites</td>
<td>Sr. Joyce Ann Zimmerman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 9</td>
<td>Proclamation and Response: The Liturgy of the Word</td>
<td>Fr. Regis Armstrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 16</td>
<td>Joining in the Sacrifice: The Liturgy of the Eucharist</td>
<td>Fr. Matthew Ernest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 23</td>
<td>Glorifying the Lord by Your Life: The Concluding Rite</td>
<td>Fr. Ajani Gibson</td>
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New Translation of Absolution Formula Goes Into Effect

As previously announced, the USCCB has indicated that the new English translation of the *Order of Penance* for use in the United States will become effective as of February 22 (Ash Wednesday), 2023, and its use will become obligatory on April 16 (Divine Mercy Sunday), 2023. Catholic Book Publishing, Liturgical Training Publications, Magnificat, and Midwest Theological Forum have published the revised *Order of Penance* in a variety of sizes and formats, and parishes in the Archdiocese of New York may wish to take advantage of discount pricing through the ICS website.

The new *Order of Penance* makes two minor changes to the longstanding English translation of the formula of absolution while keeping the essential words of the formula the same. The alterations are underlined below:

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God, the Father of mercies,
through the Death and Resurrection of his Son
has reconciled the world to himself
and poured out the Holy Spirit [Spíritum Sanctum effúdit] for the forgiveness of sins;
through the ministry of the Church
may God grant [tribuat] you pardon and peace.
AND I ABSOLVE YOU FROM YOUR SINS,
IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, +
AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
R. Amen.
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On October 25, 2022, the USCCB’s Secretariat for Divine Worship and the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions [FDLC] hosted a webinar on the revised *Order of Penance* intended for both clergy and faithful. The webinar may be viewed at the enclosed link. The FDLC has also made available three cards with the new absolution formula intended for both the confessional and for distribution to the faithful. These cards include:

- Options for the Prayer of the Penitent (8.5” x 11”, to be printed back-to-back)
- A simple order of service for “The Order of Reconciling an Individual Penitent” (large print, full sheet to be printed back-to-back)
- A simple order of service for “The Order of Reconciling an Individual Penitent” (half sheets, printed back-to-back)

Lastly, bulletin inserts offering catechesis on the new *Order of Penance* and reminders to priest-confessors on censures, and related pastoral, liturgical, and canonical considerations may also be downloaded from the FDLC website.
Liturgical Preparation Aid for Lent

The Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC) has published a free resource in English and Spanish for the Lenten season. This preparation aid includes:

• the full text of the Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution;
• music suggestions;
• an Order for the Reception of the Holy Oils;
• a liturgical calendar advisory for Lent, the Triduum, and the Easter Season; and
• preparation worksheets for the celebration of the Triduum.

This resource may be downloaded from the FDLC website (English/Spanish) and distributed freely.

Upcoming Events


Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Lectors, Ushers, and Parish Musicians are invited to gather to reflect on Christ’s Passion, Death, and Resurrection and discover its deep meaning for their lives, their ministry and their parish communities.

SATURDAY, MARCH 11
10:00 A.M. – 3:00 P.M. | St. Joseph’s Seminary, Yonkers
Registration fee: $35 (includes lunch)

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Lectors, Ushers, and Parish Musicians are invited to gather to reflect on Christ’s Passion, Death, and Resurrection and discover its deep meaning for their lives, their ministry and their parish communities.

Register by Sunday, March 5, at DayofPrayer2023.eventbrite.com

PRESENTER:
FR. RICHARD VERAS, MA
Director of Pastoral Formation and Professor of Homiletics, St. Joseph’s Seminary
Author and regular contributor to Magnificat Publications