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MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR 2015
from the Committee on Divine Worship
and the staff of the Secretariat of Divine Worship!

Rev. Daniel Merz Completes Term as Secretariat Associate Director

Rev. Daniel J. Merz has completed his term as Associate Director of the USCCB Secretariat of Divine Worship; his last day was November 26, 2014. He is returning to pastoral ministry in the Diocese of Jefferson City.

Since his arrival at the Conference in June 2011, a time when the work of the Secretariat was largely focused on implementation of the *Roman Missal, Third Edition*, Fr. Merz became an integral part of that project and many others. He was a specialist in the area of biblical and liturgical languages. With a keen eye on precise and elegant English translations of the original Latin texts, he provided expert assistance in preparing new English translations of liturgical texts for the consideration of the Bishops.

Much of Fr. Merz's other work focused on the preparation and explanations of various ritual books and fascicles. He also wrote with clarity on the Church's ongoing pastoral response to Celiac disease and gluten intolerance, and on the observance of the 50th anniversary of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* in 2013. Fr. Merz's work as a catechist in helping both the clergy and the lay faithful to understand the importance of liturgy as the source and summit of the Church's life and teaching has been a blessing to the office and a role that was profoundly necessary during this time of transition.

29 Questions on Exorcism and Its Use in the Church, Part Two

The November 2014 issue of the Newsletter presented the first part of various questions and answers about exorcism and its use in the Church's liturgical life. For the benefit of our readers, the second and final part is reprinted below. The full list of questions is available in English and Spanish at www.USCCB.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/sacramentals-blessings/exorcism.cfm.

How does a priest become an exorcist?

A priest may be appointed to the office of exorcist either on a stable basis or for a particular occasion (*ad actum*) by the diocesan bishop. In either case, the exorcist should work closely with, and under the direction of, the bishop.

What criteria are used for deciding which priests are given this responsibility?

As specified in canon 1172 §2 of the Code of Canon Law, the priest being appointed to the ministry of exorcist should possess piety, knowledge, prudence, and integrity of life. The introduction to *Exorcisms and Related Supplications* (ERS) further directs that the priest “has been specifically prepared for this office” (no. 13).

How are exorcists trained and prepared for this ministry?

Classically, the exorcist has trained for this specialized ministry through an apprenticeship model, working under the direction of an experienced exorcist. Additionally, in recent years, several programs have been established to foster the training of exorcists.

A solid theological and spiritual foundation is essential when preparing to minister as an exorcist. Bearing in mind the qualities already mentioned in the preceding question, the candidate must also maintain a balanced approach to this particular ministry, possess a spirituality that is grounded in the sacramental life of the Church, and be able to keep his curiosity in check. The guidance of a skilled spiritual director is critical in the life of the exorcist.

What, if any, rites in this text may be performed by the lay faithful?

The Rite of Major Exorcism is to be administered only by an authorized priest or bishop (*sacerdos*). If it is deemed useful, members of the lay faithful may be present for the rite, supporting the work of the exorcist by their prayers either recited privately or as instructed in the rite. However, the text cautions that the lay faithful are not to recite any prayers reserved to the exorcist (ERS, no. 35), not only because the prayers are reserved to those ordained to act in the person of Christ the Head (*in persona Christi capitis*), but also to protect the faithful from possible spiritual harm.

When an afflicted member of the faithful is female, there should be at least one other female present for the sake of propriety and discretion. At no time should the exorcist be alone with an afflicted member of the faithful, neither during consultation nor for the celebration of the rite.

How does an exorcist determine “with moral certitude” (ERS, no. 16) that the one to be exorcized is truly possessed by demonic forces, and not merely suffering from physical ailments or psychological issues?

Moral certainty is classically understood as falling between the two poles of absolute certainty and probability. Bearing that in mind, moral certitude is achieved through the examination of proofs which are weighed in accordance with the conscience of the one passing judgment. Therefore, the exorcist must utilize whatever resources are available to him when investigating a claim of demonic possession along with input from medical and mental health professionals.

The exorcist is instructed to employ the “utmost circumspection and prudence” before proceeding to the rite (ERS, no. 14). Throughout his ministry, an exorcist must establish a balance within his own mind between not believing too easily that the devil is responsible for what is manifesting, and attributing all possible manifestations solely to a natural, organic source.

Do afflicted members of the faithful undergo medical or psychological examination prior to the use of exorcism?

As part of the evaluation process (which can be established in a diocesan protocol), the afflicted member of the faithful should avail himself/herself of a thorough medical and psychological/psychiatric evaluation. Frequently, individuals present themselves claiming to be afflicted in any number of ways. Historically, however, the Church has exercised caution when evaluating such individuals for fear of unnecessarily drawing attention to the machinations of the devil or giving credit where no credit is due.

How may an exorcist ensure that an exorcism is not perceived as a magical or superstitious activity?

The exorcist himself can serve as a catechist in this matter by the way he faithfully administers the rites as provided by the Church in her wisdom. Fundamentally, the rites of exorcism are just one more way the Church tends to the pastoral care of souls, even souls that are not of her flock. However, the more obscurely and mysteriously the rite is portrayed, the more magical and superstitious the perceptions become. Given the super abundance of confusing and inaccurate information available in the public arena surrounding this particular topic, the manner in which this revised rite is announced provides for a teachable moment to believers and non-believers alike.

What ritual symbols are used in exorcisms and what do they symbolize?

In addition to the use of the Psalms and Gospel readings and the recitation of the exorcistic prayers, a series of sacred symbols is utilized in the Rite of Major Exorcism. To begin, water is blessed and sprinkled recalling the centrality of the new life the afflicted person received in Baptism and the ultimate defeat of the devil through the salvific work of Jesus Christ. The imposition of hands, as well as the breathing on the person's face (exsufflation) by the exorcist, reaffirms the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the person as a result of his/her Baptism, confirming him/her as a temple of God. Finally, the Lord's Cross is shown to the afflicted person and the Sign of the Cross is made over him/her demonstrating the power of Christ over the devil.

Should other members of the faithful be present when an exorcism is performed?

This text strongly recommends against the exorcist working in isolation (ERS, no. 34b). Even though in rare instances this may be unavoidable, the practice of performing an exorcism in solitude should be discouraged at all costs.

Where should an exorcism be performed?

The norm is to celebrate the rite of exorcism in an oratory or other appropriate place (for example, a small chapel) discreetly hidden from plain view (ERS, no. 33). It is to the advantage of the exorcist whenever possible to utilize a place that is dedicated to God's honor and not the home of the afflicted person, for instance.

Is the use of exorcism kept confidential?

For the integrity of the afflicted person's reputation as well as for those individuals who might be assisting, the preservation of confidentiality is important. It is also strongly suggested that the identity of the exorcist be kept secret or at most known only to the other priests of the diocese so as not to overwhelm the exorcist with random calls and inquiries.

May an exorcism be performed without the recipient's permission?

Given the nature of the devil's workings and the afflicted person's possible complicity in the resulting demonic possession, the exorcist should ascertain the person's consent if at all possible before proceeding with the Rite of Major Exorcism.

Are exorcisms the same everywhere, or are there regional and cultural differences?

The rites of exorcism are to be celebrated consistently following the directives (*praenotanda*) prescribed in the ritual. The rites are not to be altered at the discretion of the exorcist beyond the options clearly stated in the official text. However, before proceeding with the use of the rite, it is helpful for the exorcist to be aware of any cultural differences and regional influences that may have impacted the current state of the afflicted person. An evaluative instrument can assist in shedding light on such categories as: 1) the places where the person may have visited (healers, mediums, psychics); 2) the practices in which the person may have been involved (cleansings, New Age religion, Reiki); and 3) the ways that the person may have opened himself/herself directly to the dominion of the devil (magic, witchcraft, Satanic worship).

In the formulas of exorcism, what is the difference between the deprecative formulas and the imperative formulas?

The deprecative formulas are exorcistic prayers, addressed to God, which request the liberation of the afflicted person. The imperative formulas are addressed directly to the inhabiting demonic spirit, commanding it to depart in the name of Jesus Christ.

When would each be used?

The deprecative formulas and the imperative formulas are presented as sets in the rite of exorcism with the deprecative formula always being used first with the option of then using the imperative formula. The deprecative formulas may be used without the imperative formulas but the opposite is not permitted (ERS, no. 28).

When would the rites contained in the appendices be used, and by whom?

The prayers of supplication and exorcism found in Appendix I (“A Supplication and Exorcism which May be Used in Particular Circumstances of the Church”) may be likened to the prayers that Pope Leo XIII appended to the previous rite of exorcism in 1890. The focus of these prayers is to address and remedy any demonic influence on places and things in particular, as well as to remedy attacks against the Church in a more general way. As in the case of a “major exorcism,” the ordinary minister of these prayers would be a priest appointed for this purpose or the bishop himself.

The prayers and invocations that comprise Appendix II (“Supplications which May be Used by the Faithful Privately in their Struggle against the Powers of Darkness”) are intended for general use of the clergy and the lay faithful in combatting the temptations of sin or spiritual attacks by the devil.

When would a bishop or pastor appropriately recommend Appendix II to a member to a member of his flock?

When it is learned through such avenues as pastoral counseling, spiritual direction, or the Sacrament of Penance that a member of the faithful is experiencing assaults by the devil, the prayers and invocations found in Appendix II may be recommended. (The Committee on Divine Worship intends to make Appendix II available as a separate publication once the English texts have been approved by the Holy See.)

An advertisement for Daily Bible Readings. It features a background image of an open Bible with a white arrow pointing downwards. The text is centered and reads: "GET THE DAILY BIBLE READINGS sent to your e-mail every morning! Sign up for this free service at www.USCCB.org/bible/readings".

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