

**THIRTY QUESTIONS
ON THE INSTRUCTION *REDEMPTIONIS SACRAMENTUM*
FOR DIOCESAN LITURGY AND COMMUNICATIONS PERSONNEL**

1. What is the translation of the title of the instruction “*Redemptionis Sacramentum*”?

The title, *Sacrament of Redemption*, is taken from the opening words of the instruction: “In the Most Holy Eucharist, Mother Church with steadfast faith acknowledges the **Sacrament of redemption**, joyfully takes it to herself, celebrates it and reveres it in adoration, proclaiming the death of Christ Jesus and confessing his Resurrection until he comes in glory to hand over, as unconquered Lord and Ruler, eternal Priest and King of the Universe, a kingdom of truth and life to the immense majesty of the Almighty Father.”

2. What is an “instruction”?

An instruction is a document of a Roman Congregation which provides guidance on how to properly implement the Church’s law. In this case, the instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* is intended to assist Bishops in the implementation of the *Missale Romanum* or *Roman Missal* and those rites which pertain to the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament outside Mass (see *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass*). The third edition of the *Missale Romanum* was published by the authority of Pope John Paul II in 2002 and is now being implemented by Bishops throughout the world.

3. Why is this document being published?

On April 17, 2003, Pope John Paul II published an encyclical letter on the Most Holy Eucharist, entitled *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. In that letter, the Pope called upon the Roman Congregations to develop an instruction explaining the deeper level of liturgical norms in the light of recent abuses of liturgical law throughout the world.

4. Why are abuses of liturgical norms of such great concern?

In his encyclical letter last year, the Holy Father noted that the Mystery of the Eucharist “is too great for anyone to permit himself to treat according to his own whim, so that its sacredness and its universal ordering would be obscured.” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 52). The instruction expands on this by noting that “the one who acts thus by giving free reign to his own inclinations, even if he is a Priest, injures the substantial unity of the Roman Rite, which is to be vigorously preserved, and becomes responsible for actions that are in no way consistent with the hunger and thirst for the living God that is experienced by people today.” (RS, no.11)

5. Does the instruction recommend anything beyond the observance of laws?

Yes. The instruction urges that efforts be made to encourage an appreciation of “the sense of deep wonder before the mystery of faith” which is at the heart of an interior participation [in the Liturgy,] best fostered by a regular participation in the *Liturgy of the Hours*, sacramentals, and popular devotions. The instruction also points out that there is a pressing need for the biblical and liturgical formation of the People of God.

6. Is this instruction aimed only at liturgical abuses in the United States?

No. The instruction was developed after consultation among Bishops and experts throughout the world. The abuses of liturgical law addressed by the instruction occur in many parts of the world and may not all be present in the dioceses of the United States of America. The instruction provides an opportunity for all Bishops, priests, and liturgical experts to conduct an “examination of conscience” on how faithfully we have implemented the revised Eucharistic rites.

7. Are there specific concerns that are being addressed?

The document addresses a wide range of abuses, or violations of liturgical law in regard to the celebration of Mass and the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Sections are devoted to such questions as who regulates the sacred liturgy, how the participation of the lay faithful can be encouraged, the way Mass is properly celebrated, the distribution of Holy Communion, and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

8. How does this affect the role of the laity at Mass?

The instruction makes no change in already existing liturgical law. There is, therefore, no change in this regard. The document does re-emphasize, however, the mandate of the Second Vatican Council some forty years ago that the full, conscious, and active participation of the laity is the goal to be considered before all else in the reform of the sacred liturgy.

9. What does it say about altar girls?

The instruction recalls that servers of both genders are allowed at the discretion of the Diocesan Bishop and in accord with the provisions of liturgical law.

10. The document states “sacred ministers may not deny the sacraments to those who seek them in a reasonable manner, are rightly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them.” Does this mean that politicians who hold positions antithetical to the church cannot be denied communion if they approach the altar?

Such matters are decided by the Diocesan Bishop in conformity with Canon Law and other documents of the Holy See.

11. Will I see specific changes in my parish?

Hopefully, the instruction will serve as an occasion for all parishes to examine carefully ways in which they can more faithfully celebrate the Eucharist according to the liturgical books. In those places where careful attention to the Liturgy has been given in the past, the instruction will not be as necessary as in other places.

12. What is the acceptable posture for receiving Communion? What if someone takes another posture?

The instruction recalls that the *Roman Missal* directs Conferences of Bishops to determine the proper posture for receiving Holy Communion. The Bishops of the United States have decided

that the norm for receiving Holy Communion is standing, but that those who kneel to receive Holy Communion should not be denied the Sacrament.

13. How do these changes relate to the renewal of the liturgy called for by the Second Vatican Council? Are we going back?

The instruction is based strictly on the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum concilium)* and the reformed liturgical books produced in response to the mandate of the Second Vatican Council. It was the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council who first taught that “regulation of the liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church, that is, on the Apostolic See and, accordingly as law determines, on the Bishop.” (SC, no. 22§1) Therefore, “no other person, not even if he is a priest, may on his own add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy.” (SC, no. 22§3)

14. Who in a diocese decides what is appropriate liturgical practice?

The Diocesan Bishop, as moderator of the liturgical life of his diocese, is responsible for the implementation of the liturgical reform. He is often assisted in this task by liturgical experts on a Liturgical Commission or in an Office for Worship.

15. There seems to be a concern for not confusing liturgical roles? What does this mean?

The instruction is seeking to implement the *Constitution on the Liturgy*, no. 28: “In liturgical celebrations each one, minister or layperson, who has an office to perform, should do all of, but only, those parts which pertain to that office by the nature of the rite and the principles of liturgy.”

16. What roles are available to laity? Can any lay person be a liturgical minister?

The instruction notes that lay persons “rightly and laudably” (RS 43) serve in a variety of ministries at Mass, such as acolyte, lector, sacristan, cantor, etc... Like all ministries, lay ministries should be the subject of careful preparation and catechesis.

17. What about the Liturgy of the Word?

The instruction reminds us that the proclamation of the Scriptures be well prepared and explained and liturgical texts and songs are to be carefully selected. The liturgical texts should not be emended and the Liturgy of the Word should be celebrated immediately before the Liturgy of the Eucharist and in the same place. Scriptural readings are to be chosen according to the norms and non-biblical readings are never to be substituted.

18. Who can read the Gospel and deliver a homily at Mass?

The proclamation of the Gospel and the homily are reserved to the ordained, while a lay person is prohibited from preaching at any time during Mass, even in the cases of a seminarian or pastoral assistant. Instructions or testimonies by a lay person, however, may be given after the Prayer after Communion for a serious reason, but the homily should not be omitted. Such matters are regulated by the Diocesan Bishop.

19. Does the instruction change the Offertory Procession?

No. The *Roman Missal* states, and the instruction reiterates, that the gifts presented by the faithful are received by the priest or deacon and should consist only of bread and wine and actual money and gifts for the poor or the Church. The instruction does clarify the law in noting that “Money...just as other contributions for the poor, should be placed in an appropriate place which should be away from the eucharistic table (altar).” (RS, no. 70).

20. What abuses are described concerning the Eucharistic prayer?

The instruction describes as abuses the use of unauthorized Eucharistic Prayers or the division of the Eucharistic Prayer among deacons or lay persons, the insertion of unauthorized acclamations, and the breaking of the host at the words of institution.

21. Does this document change the Sign of Peace?

No. The instruction simply reiterates the *Roman Missal* in saying that the sign of peace is given before Holy Communion in a sober manner by each person present and to those standing around them.

22. Should the priest regularly go to the tabernacle before the distribution of Holy Communion?

No. The instruction cites the *Roman Missal* in reminding us that because the faithful should ordinarily receive only hosts consecrated at the Mass which they are attending, the priest should not usually go to the tabernacle for already consecrated hosts to be used in the distribution of Holy Communion.

23. Must concelebrating priests receive Holy Communion under both kinds?

Yes. The instruction states that they should receive Holy Communion under both kinds from the Eucharist consecrated at that Mass.

24. What procedure is to be followed when more than one chalice is needed for the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds?

When more than one chalice is needed for the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds, several smaller chalices may be placed on the altar at the preparation of the gifts. The instruction prohibits the use of “flagons” or other such vessels from which the precious Blood is poured.

While the use of flagons is a widespread practice in the United States, the instruction directs that they no longer be used in order to reduce the risk of spilling of the Precious Blood.

25. What happens to the Sacred Species after the distribution of Holy Communion?

The pouring of the Precious Blood down the *sacarium* or onto the ground is prohibited in the strongest of terms, while the instruction notes that whatever remains of the Precious Blood after Holy Communion is consumed by the priest or other ministers, and the extra consecrated hosts are to be reserved in the tabernacle.

26. Why the emphasis on the title “Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion” instead of “Eucharistic Minister”?

The full title of this ministry more accurately reflects its purpose, which is to distribute Holy Communion in the absence of an ordinary minister of Holy Communion. The instruction notes that Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion never perform their ministry in the presence of a sufficient number of ordinary ministers of Holy Communion.

27. How many ways can one receive Communion? In the hand, on the tongue, by intinction?

The consecrated host may be received on the tongue or in the hand at the discretion of the individual communicant. The instruction also recommends that, when possible, the Precious Blood be offered to the faithful by drinking from the chalice or by receiving on the tongue a consecrated host which has been dipped in the Precious Blood by the minister. Self-communication by the faithful is never permitted.

28. Is it acceptable to genuflect before receiving Communion?

The *Roman Missal* directs that Bishops are to choose a sign of veneration for the faithful when they receive Holy Communion standing. While the sign of veneration chosen by the Bishops of the United States is a simple bow of head, no person should ever be denied Holy Communion because they have made a different gesture.

29. What about Eucharistic exposition?

Eucharistic exposition should be celebrated in every parish at least annually and, with the guidance of the Bishop, even perpetual adoration may take place in those places where there is a sufficient number of the faithful to continually worship the exposed Sacrament. “It is highly recommended that at least in the cities and the larger towns, the diocesan Bishop should designate a church building for perpetual adoration...” (SR, no. 140)

30. What does the instruction state about First Confession?

The instruction reminds us that First Communion is always preceded by First Penance. The celebration of First Communion is recommended between the second and sixth Sundays of Easter, on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, or at another time, but not on Holy Thursday, apart from exceptional cases.