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**Secretariat for the Liturgy**

3211 Fourth Street, N.E.

Washington D.C. 20017

Tel: 202-541-3060

Fax: 202-541-3088

[www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)

## *Redemptionis sacramentum:* **A New Instruction on the Holy Eucharist<sup>1</sup>**

In his encyclical letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, published on April 17, 2003, Pope John Paul II called upon the appropriate Roman Congregations to prepare and publish an instruction, “including prescriptions of a juridical nature” explaining the “deeper meaning of liturgical norms” in the light of liturgical abuses in violation of those same norms” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 52).

Thus, on the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, March 25, 2004, Cardinal Francis Arinze, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, signed a new instruction entitled *Redemptionis sacramentum*, following an extended consultation with the Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith. The instruction was approved by Pope John Paul II on March 19, 2004.

The **Preamble** to the instruction (nos. 1-13) begins by recalling how Christ has given authority over the liturgy to his Church that the truth concerning him found in the liturgy might be preserved. Thus great care should be taken so that the liturgy is celebrated according to the norms of the liturgical books.

Abuses of the Church’s liturgical norms impede that full, conscious and active participation envisioned by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council some forty years ago. Based on a false sense of liberty, such abuses distort the authentic meaning of Sacramental signs, obscure the Catholic Faith, impede the faithful from seeing Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist, and risk compromising the substantial unity of the Roman Rite.

11. The Mystery of the Eucharist “is too great for anyone to permit himself to treat it according to his own whim, so that its sacredness and its universal ordering would be obscured”.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, anyone 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 ought to be vigorously preserved,<sup>3</sup> and becomes responsible for actions that are in no

<sup>1</sup>The full text of the instruction in Latin, English, and Spanish may be found at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 52: AAS 95(2003) p. 468.

<sup>3</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 4, Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, nos. 1, 2, 6.; Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum: Missale Romanum*, i, no. 399; Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Instruction *Liturgiam authenticam*, no. 4.

way consistent with the hunger and thirst for the living God that is experienced by people today. Nor do such actions serve authentic pastoral care or proper liturgical renewal; instead, they deprive

Christ's faithful of their patrimony and their heritage. For arbitrary actions are not conducive to true renewal,<sup>4</sup> but are detrimental to the right of Christ's faithful to a liturgical celebration that is an expression of the Church's life in accordance with her tradition and discipline. In the end, they introduce elements of distortion and disharmony into the very celebration of the Eucharist, which is oriented in its own lofty way and by its very nature to signifying and wondrously bringing about the communion of divine life and the unity of the People of God.<sup>5</sup> The result is uncertainty in matters of doctrine, perplexity and scandal on the part of the People of God, and, almost as a necessary consequence, bitter reactions, all of which greatly confuse and sadden many of Christ's faithful in this age of ours when Christian life is often particularly difficult on account of the inroads "secularization" as well.<sup>6</sup>

The first chapter of the instruction, **The Regulation of the Sacred Liturgy** (nos. 14-35), recalls the conciliar teaching that "regulation of the liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church, that is, on the Apostolic See and, accordingly as the law determines, on the bishop."<sup>7</sup> The Roman Pontiff enjoys supreme, full, and immediate authority over the liturgy throughout the world, while the Apostolic See exercises this authority by the promulgation of typical editions, recognition of vernacular editions, and moderation of the celebration of the sacrifice of the Mass.

The diocesan Bishop, high priest of his flock and dispenser of the sacred mysteries, gathers priests, deacons, and the lay faithful around him in his Cathedral church for the celebration of the prototype of the Eucharistic liturgy. He is to promulgate norms, as prescribed by the liturgical books, and moderate, direct, inspire, and regulate all celebrations of the liturgy, ever seeking to assure the internal and external participation of the faithful in liturgical celebrations.

[21.] It pertains to the diocesan Bishop, then, "within the limits of his competence, to set forth liturgical norms in his Diocese, by which all are bound".<sup>8</sup> Still, the Bishop must take care not to allow the removal of that liberty foreseen by the norms of the liturgical books so that the celebration may be adapted in an intelligent manner to the Church building, or to the group of the faithful who are present, or to particular pastoral circumstances in such a way that the universal sacred rite is truly accommodated to human understanding.<sup>9</sup>

The diocesan Bishop erects commissions on liturgy, music and art to assist him in the task of perfecting the celebration of the liturgy. The Conference of Bishops is also assigned an important role by liturgical law, charged with the development of vernacular editions, including translations and those adaptations prescribed by the liturgical books.

Priests, forming a single presbyterate, are the Bishop's co-workers and gather the faithful for the celebration of the liturgy in union with him. The priest presides at the Eucharist in the person of Christ, not only for the benefit of the gathered liturgical assembly, but on behalf of the whole Church. The priest should see to it that the celebration of the Most Holy Eucharist is the center of parish life. Steeped in

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 72: AAS 95 (2003) p.692.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 23: AAS 95 (2003) pp. 448-449; S. Congregation of Rites, Instruction *Eucharisticum mysterium*, 25 May 1967, no. 6: AAS 59 (1967) p.545.

<sup>6</sup> S. Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, Instruction *Inaestimabile donum*.

<sup>7</sup> Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no.22 §1

<sup>8</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, can. 838 §4.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Consilium for Implementing the Constitution on the Liturgy, *Dubium: Notitiae* 1 (1965) 254.

liturgical art and science, the priest faithfully observes the Church's rites and inspires in the faithful an understanding of the liturgy they celebrate with him. Deacons possess a role of service in the Church and in the Liturgy and must celebrate the liturgy with a humble heart and according to the norms of the liturgical books.

The second chapter is entitled **Participation of the Lay Christian Faithful in the Eucharistic Celebration** (nos. 36-47). In Baptism, the faithful are freed from sin, incorporated into the Church and deputed for the active celebration of the liturgy as a royal and priestly people. This participation in the liturgy consists of singing acclamations, responses, psalms and antiphons, and of actions, gestures, and the observance of sacred silence as prescribed by the liturgical books. All should be arranged to facilitate this participation.

- To countermand certain superficial notions that “everyone must have something concrete to do beyond the actions and gestures,” prescribed for Mass, efforts should be made to encourage an appreciation of “that sense of deep wonder before the mystery of faith” which is at the heart of an interior participation, best fostered by a regular celebration of the *Liturgy of the Hours*, sacramentals, and popular devotions.
- The Church does not gather of her own volition, but in response to the call of the Holy Spirit and through the ministry of an ordained priest. “Accordingly, terms such as *celebrating community* or *celebrating assembly* and similar terms should not be used injudiciously” (no. 42).
- “For the good of the community and of the whole Church of God, some of the lay faithful according to tradition have rightly and laudably exercised ministries in the celebration of the Sacred liturgy,” (no. 43) including those temporarily deputed to lay persons, such as acolytes, lectors and those described in numbers 102-105 of the *Roman Missal*. Like all ministers of the liturgy, they are called upon to do all but only their role. The practice of engaging both boys and girls as altar servers should continue to be encouraged, as should associations of altar servers.

Chapter three, **The Proper Celebration of Mass** (nos. 48-79), recalls the requirements of the *Roman Missal* for bread and wine. “By reason of the sign, it is appropriate that at least some parts of the Eucharistic bread coming from the fraction should be distributed to at least some of the faithful in Communion,” although the use of small hosts is deemed customary for the most part. (no.49)

- The instruction describes as among the most serious abuses the use of unauthorized Eucharistic Prayers or the division of the Eucharistic Prayer among deacons or lay persons. In order that dialogues and acclamations may be used effectively, the Eucharistic Prayer should be prayed without musical accompaniment or the insertion of unauthorized acclamations. Other dimensions of the Eucharistic Prayer and the Communion Rite are then discussed. The host should not be broken at the words of institution and the name of Pope and the Bishop should not be omitted from the intercessions.
- Both music and vesture should reflect the dignity of the liturgy. The scriptures to be proclaimed should be well prepared and explained and liturgical texts and songs 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 chosen according to the norms and non-biblical readings may never be substituted.
- The proclamation of the Gospel and the homily are both 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

a “pastoral assistant.” Instructions or testimonies by a lay person, however, may be given after the Prayer after Communion for a serious reason. The diocesan Bishop should see to it that the homily is based only on liturgical or scriptural texts or the liturgical year or rites and all Scripture must be interpreted in the light of its liturgical context in Christ. No unauthorized Creeds may be used.

- The gifts presented by the faithful and received by the priest or deacon should consist only of bread and wine or actual money and gifts for the poor or the Church. “Money,...just as other contributions for the poor, should be placed in an appropriate place which should be away from the eucharistic table.” (70)
- The sign of peace is given only before Holy Communion, and then, in a sober manner, by each to those standing around them. The breaking of the bread is done by the priest with reverence, assisted by the deacon and concelebrants, but never by lay persons.
- The instruction then reflects on the joining of various rites to Mass according to the liturgical norms. While it is never permitted to join the *Sacrament of Penance* with Mass, Confessions may be heard before Mass begins, or even during Mass. The Mass may never be joined with any sort of meal, nor may it be celebrated on a dining room table, except in cases of serious necessity. Mass may not be celebrated for the promotion of political causes or for the mere demonstration of pomp, nor may the rites of other religions be introduced into the liturgy.

The fourth chapter of the instruction, **Holy Communion** (nos. 80-107), notes that those who approach to receive Holy Communion should be free from mortal sin. Thus, the Sacrament of Penance should be conveniently available at regular times outside Mass.

- Care should be taken in those cases where large numbers of persons present themselves for the reception of Holy Communion, or when those ignorant of the meaning of Holy Communion are present.
- First Communion is always preceded by First Penance, except in cases of necessity. First Communion is celebrated most appropriately 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.
- The ministers of Holy Communion are the priest celebrant or other priests or deacons who are present, or, in cases of necessity, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. 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.
- The Conference of Bishops determines whether the faithful receive Holy Communion kneeling or standing. No one who is properly disposed and not prohibited by the law may be denied Holy Communion because they have assumed the posture of kneeling or of standing. While the faithful may always receive Holy Communion on the tongue, where it has been approved by the Conference of Bishops, they may also receive Holy Communion in the hand, unless there is danger of profanation. Communicants may neither take the host by themselves nor, by themselves intinct the host in the Precious Blood. Under no circumstances may consecrated hosts be mixed with non-consecrated hosts, nor may non-consecrated hosts be distributed for any reason.

- The priests, whether concelebrating or attending in choir, “must communicate before they proceed with the distribution of Holy Communion.” (97)
- Because of its sign value, the reception of the Eucharist under both kinds is encouraged by the liturgical books, though it should never be considered an absolute necessity and the norms of each Conference of Bishops should be carefully followed. In the Dioceses of the United States of America the *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion* have been approved and confirmed in regard to such questions. When there is a danger of spillage of the Precious Blood, a lack of sufficient ordinary or extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, or other pastoral impediments, Holy Communion should be distributed under the form of bread alone.
- When more than one chalice is needed for 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.<sup>10</sup>
- The pouring of the Precious Blood down a *sacrarium* 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, while extra consecrated hosts are to be reserved in the tabernacle.

Chapter five is entitled **Certain Other Matters Concerning the Eucharist** (nos. 108-128). Except in cases of necessity, and then only with the guidance of the diocesan Bishop, the Eucharist should always be celebrated in a sacred place, and it is never licit to celebrate the Eucharist in a place ordinarily reserved for non-Christian worship.

- Priests are called upon to celebrate the Eucharist frequently, even daily, even when the faithful are not able to be present. Even if they are unknown to the rector or pastor of a Church, priests are to be admitted to concelebration after presenting the proper documentation from their Bishop or religious superior. Priests may celebrate the liturgy in Latin or in another language, except in those cases where ecclesiastical authorities have scheduled a Mass in the vernacular, in which case the priest is to honor this practice.
- When there are many concelebrants present, the language best known to the priests should be chosen for the Eucharistic prayer. Priests who do not know the language of the Eucharistic Prayer are not to concelebrate, but may participate in choir.
- Sacred vessels are to be made strictly according to the norm of law as determined by the Conference of Bishops and the liturgical books. The materials used must be noble in the common estimation of the people and not be fragile. Such vessels should be blessed and purified according to the prescriptions of law. Altar cloths and linens should be regularly cleaned and the instruction recommends that before washing they be rinsed in a *sacrarium*.
- Vestments should be of the colors prescribed by the liturgical books. The use of the alb is then described, as is the requirement that the alb be worn over a religious habit. Celebrants are to wear an alb and chasuble, with stole between, while concelebrants may wear simply an alb and stole. Deacons wear an alb and stole and may add the dalmatic. Priests should never omit sacred vesture, or wear simply a stole over a religious habit.

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<sup>10</sup> See *Clarification on the Communion Rite* in this newsletter on page 7.

Chapter six, **The Reservation of the Most Holy Eucharist and Eucharistic Worship Outside Mass** (nos. 129-145), reflects at length on a subject already presented in the encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. Eucharistic adoration plays an indispensable role in the life of individual members of the faithful and in the liturgy, and has its origin and end in the celebration of the Eucharist.

- The proper, prominent and secure placement of the tabernacle in a place suitable for prayer is a matter of greatest importance, as is the regular administration of Holy Communion to the sick and shut-ins by priests, deacons, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion according to the proper rites of the *Roman Ritual*.
- Adoration of the Eucharist outside Mass is a gift of inestimable value which should be fostered by pastors, practiced by the faithful and nurtured wherever possible.
- Exposition of the Eucharist for the adoration of the faithful must strictly follow the liturgical norms and may include the praying of the rosary. Such 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 are 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...” (no. 140)
- Eucharistic processions, which are particularly appropriate on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, and during diocesan Eucharistic congresses, are then discussed; both of these activities are regulated by the diocesan Bishop.

The seventh chapter, **Extraordinary Functions of the Lay Faithful** (nos. 146-168), begins with a reflection on the unique ministry of the priest, who acts in the person of Christ, head and shepherd of the Church. Where there are not enough ordained ministers to fulfill priestly liturgical functions, certain offices may be deputed to the lay faithful. However, such ministries should be the subject of careful catechesis.

- Of special note is the role of “pastoral assistant,” temporarily deputed to coordinate the evangelization and administration of a given parish or region. While many pastoral assistants “have undoubtedly served the good of the Church by providing assistance to the Bishop, Priests and Deacons in the carrying out of their pastoral activity,” (no. 149) all ambiguity concerning the nature of this function as truly extraordinary, especially in regard to the liturgy, should be carefully avoided. The faithful may never wear the vesture of deacons or priests and must carefully avoid anything which would blur the extraordinary character of their ministry.
- Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are called upon to distribute the Holy Eucharist when an insufficient number of ordinary ministers are available. While they may never perform this ministry in the place of ordinary ministers, they may distribute Holy Communion either during the liturgy or to the sick who are unable to be present. The diocesan Bishop regulates their ministry and may publish norms in this regard.
- The instruction then recalls how the homily is reserved for the ordained, though preaching by the laity outside Mass may take place according to the norms of the Diocesan Bishop
- Every effort must be made to secure a priest for Mass not only on Sundays, but indeed for every day. However, when the diocesan Bishop is unable to provide a priest for Mass on Sundays, the

faithful may be gathered to pray. Care must be taken to distinguish between such prayers and the Mass itself, and the coordination of such rites should be sought through the Conference of Bishops. The parts of such a rite should be distributed among the faithful, and no one person should be seen as presiding in a priestly or diaconal role.

- The instruction concludes this section by noting that those who have left the clerical state are prohibited from exercising any office or duty in the liturgy, unless for a grave and urgent cause.

The final chapter of the instruction, **Remedies** (nos. 169-184), addresses various solutions for liturgical abuses.

169. Whenever an abuse is committed in the celebration of the sacred Liturgy, it is to be seen as a real falsification of Catholic Liturgy. St Thomas wrote, “the vice of falsehood is perpetrated by anyone who offers worship to God on behalf of the Church in a manner contrary to that which is established by the Church with divine authority, and to which the Church is accustomed”.<sup>11</sup>

The best remedy for liturgical abuses is the biblical and liturgical formation of the faithful, since the understanding of the liturgy promotes its authentic celebration.

- Delicts concerning sacrilege and the Most Holy Eucharist are reserved to the Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith. Other grave abuses are then described, with particular reference to thirty-five of the articles described briefly above.
- The Diocesan Bishop is responsible for addressing most abuses of liturgical norms, whether they involve priests, deacons, religious institutes or societies of apostolic life in his diocese. He may impose canonical sanctions or, in the case of more grave or difficult matters, refer the case to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.
- It is the concern of all that the liturgy be celebrated with reverence and without distortion of the liturgical norms. Abuse should, therefore, be brought to the attention of the Diocesan Bishop, who may even choose to refer the matter to the Holy See.

The instruction concludes by invoking the aid of the Blessed Virgin Mary, “Woman of the Eucharist,” that truth and fidelity might characterize the way in which Bishops, priests, deacons and all the faithful approach the liturgical books and liturgical norms of the Church.

186. Let all Christ’s faithful participate in the Most Holy Eucharist as fully, consciously and actively as they can,<sup>12</sup> honouring it lovingly by their devotion and the manner of their life. Let Bishops, Priests and Deacons, in the exercise of the sacred ministry, examine their consciences as regards the authenticity and fidelity of the actions they have performed in the name of Christ and the Church in the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy. Let each one of the sacred ministers ask himself, even with severity, whether he has respected the rights of the lay members of Christ’s faithful, who confidently entrust themselves and their children to him, relying on him to fulfil for the faithful those sacred functions that the Church intends to carry out in celebrating the sacred Liturgy at Christ’s command.<sup>13</sup> For each one should always remember that he is a servant of the Sacred Liturgy.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II, 2, q. 93, a. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 14; cf. Also nn. 11, 41, and 48.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. S. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, q. 64, a. 9 ad 1.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Missale Romanum, Institutio Generalis*, no. 24.

## Clarification on Holy Communion Under Both Kinds

The instruction *Redemptionis sacramentum*, nos. 105 and 106 addresses certain ritual questions concerning Holy Communion when distributed under both kinds. Most notable is the prohibition of “flagons,” or containers from which the Precious Blood is commonly poured in the course of the fraction rite:

[105.] If one chalice is not sufficient for the Communion to be distributed under both kinds to the Priest concelebrants or Christ’s faithful, there is no reason why the Priest celebrant should not use several chalices. (Cf. *Ibid.*, nos. 207 and 285a.4). For it is to be remembered that all Priests in celebrating Holy Mass are bound to receive Communion under both kinds. It is praiseworthy, by reason of the sign value, to use a main chalice of larger dimensions, together with smaller chalices.

[106.] However, the pouring of the Blood of Christ after the consecration from one vessel to another is completely to be avoided, lest anything should happen that would be to the detriment of so great a mystery. Never to be used for containing the Blood of the Lord are flagons, bowls, or other vessels that are not fully in accord with the established norms.

On June 14, 2001, *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America* was approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and subsequently confirmed by the Holy See. Numbers 36 and 37 of these *Norms* address the procedures to be followed when Holy Communion under both kinds is celebrated. Read in tandem with the instruction *Redemptionis sacramentum*, these norms describe the following procedure for the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds: “The altar is prepared with corporal, purificator, Missal, and chalice (unless the chalice is prepared at a side table) by the deacon and servers. The gifts of bread and wine are brought forward by the faithful and received by the priest or deacon at a convenient place (Cf. GIRM, no. 333).” (*Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds* (NDHC), no. 36)

Because the instruction prohibits the consecration of wine in flagons, chalices for distribution to priests and to the faithful are prepared at this point. It should be noted that the principal chalice and the vessel containing the bread should be larger than the smaller vessels for distribution to the faithful. Smaller chalices of wine may be prepared at the altar or at a side table and are then suitably placed on the altar. “As the *Agnus Dei* or *Lamb of God* is begun, the Bishop or priest alone, or with the assistance of the deacon, and if necessary of concelebrating priests, breaks the eucharistic bread. Other empty... ciboria or patens are then brought to the altar if this is necessary. The deacon or priest places the consecrated bread in several ciboria or patens..., if necessary, ...as required for the distribution of Holy Communion. If it is not possible to accomplish this distribution in a reasonable time, the celebrant may call upon the assistance of other deacons or concelebrating priests... (NDHC, no. 37)”


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