

10 October 2011

Dear Brother Priests,

Urgent and Important

As I stated at the Presbyteral Assembly, and as I clarified in a letter to all of you, my chief intention in considering specific points in the liturgy, is simply to encourage throughout the diocese, a greater sense of reverence and a real truthfulness in what we say and do at the Mass. I still plan to send you some bullet points with regard to specific matters we discussed, but one individual point seems already to have drawn attention, and so I feel I must send and make public this letter to assist all of us in our teaching office.

There can be no doubt that the need for catechesis exists. There is also little doubt that some of these matters can be difficult to catechize. Without my issuing any public instruction other than a letter confirming my personal request to you to teach your people according to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, the “blogosphere,” has begun speculation and, perhaps, innuendo that I have decreed communion under both species should be completely done away with. You and I both know, no such decree has been, or will be made. As you know, and as I hope you are telling those who wonder, all I’ve done is to ask you patiently, prudently, and practically, to begin instructing your people according to the Roman Missal and implementing the General Instruction.

Since there seems to be some confusion with regard to what the GIRM says, I’ll remind you that you can order the document on-line from the USCCB Office of Liturgy (making certain that it’s the third edition). Here, however I’ll mention a few germane points from the document and, specifically, from the “Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America (Norms),” which the USCCB document includes.

We’ll first go back as far as the Document of the Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, which states:

“The dogmatic principles which were laid down by the Council of Trent remaining intact, Communion under both kinds may be granted when the bishops think fit, not only to clerics and religious, but also to the laity, in cases to be determined by the Apostolic See, as, for instance, to the newly ordained in the Mass of their sacred ordination, to the newly professed in the Mass of their religious profession, and to the newly baptized in the Mass which follows their baptism (SC, 55).”

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Without here going into the “dogmatic principles laid down by the Council of Trent,” it is worth noting the examples that Vatican II considers when allowing communion under both kinds – newly ordained priests at their ordination, religious sisters and brothers at their profession, and those coming into the Church at their baptism and first communion. With these examples given by the Council for the distribution of Communion under both

species, it would be hard to argue that Vatican II envisioned communion under both forms every week.

Now, with the issuance of the Roman Missal, the Church gets more specific in matters such as these (thus the General Instruction which we are presently using as our guide). The Missal goes further than the Vatican II document, instructing that the Chrism Mass and Corpus Christi would be good occasions for distributing Communion under both species, as might be the distribution to wedding couples at their marriage, to children receiving their First Communion, to Confirmation candidates at their Confirmation, to consecrated religious at their conventual Mass, to women and men on retreat, and to deacons and seminarians at any Mass. The document also allows the pastor to choose certain other days, such as the patronal feast of the parish, to distribute under both forms, so long as the reasons are good and so long as all other conditions are met. But it does warn pastors:

“In practice, the need to avoid obscuring the role of the Priest and the Deacon as the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion by an excessive use of extraordinary ministers might in some circumstances constitute a reason either for limiting the distribution of Holy Communion under both species...(Norms, 24)”

The Third Edition of the Roman Missal reinforces the right of bishops to make additional allowances for reception of Communion under both species, beyond that which the documents already mention:

“The Diocesan Bishop is also given the faculty to permit Communion under both kinds whenever it may seem appropriate to the Priest to whom a community has been entrusted as its own shepherd, provided that the faithful have been well instructed and that there is no danger of profanation of the Sacrament or of the rite’s becoming difficult because of the large number of participants or for some other cause (Roman Missal, 283).”

This permission has been assumed, if not expressed directly in the past. I recognize this, and I understand fully that communion under both forms at every Mass has become common practice at some parishes.

However, I have been told of, and have personally experienced, the reality that the provision both that the faithful be well instructed and that there be no danger of profanation of the Sacrament, is not being met. As such, while recognizing the need for patient, prudent and practical steps according to your individual parishes, I’ve asked you to move in this direction.

As I’ve said, over and over again, and as you know well, this requires catechesis. So many do not understand the Eucharist as the memorial of Christ’s Sacrifice, his death and resurrection; nor the real presence of Christ, body, blood, soul, and divinity, under both species of bread and

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wine; nor the role of the ordinary and, if necessary, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist. Most of all (and this has been my point from the start) so many of our people

do not understand the kinds of reverence due at all times to the sacrament, whether within the Eucharistic Liturgy or outside the celebration.

This gets back to the need for the new translation, and every point I've attempted to make. What we say and do at the Mass, and what we do before the Lord present in the tabernacle matters.

Thus, I cannot in good conscience, allow us to go forward without addressing these matters. That's specifically what I've asked you to do. Please help your people to know and understand the beautiful gift we have in the Eucharist, to know our obligations of preparing for reception of the Sacrament, both in terms of our preparation through the Sacrament of Confession, our observance of the pre-communion fast, our attending to our attire as best we can, and the like. Please help them to know of Christ's presence, fully and entirely in the Sacred Host. Our people know well, the aspect of the Mass which is the Sacred banquet, but help them to know the Eucharist at the Memorial of Christ's loving Sacrifice for them. Help them to understand your role in laying down your own life as the minister of Christ's Body and Blood, present in the Host.

Christ offers Himself, whole and entire, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity at every Mass to every woman and man who is prepared to receive Him. At the end of the day, our goal should be to help every, man, woman and child really to understand this, in a profound and life-changing way. If we recognized the gift that we already have, what an impact that would make upon us and upon the world! So, let us tell out this Good News!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Robert C. Morlino Bishop of Madison