

Catechesis on Liturgical Abuses

From time-to-time, we find ourselves participating in parish liturgies—outside our home parish—when we are on vacations, visiting family members, etc. While the Mass should be the same from one church to another, we may sometimes experience a difference of liturgical practices. The Church some years ago published a new document dealing with liturgical abuses.

The document is entitled *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (Latin, “*The Sacrament of Redemption*”). It was prepared by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments at the request of Pope John Paul II, and it offers practical rules (norms) concerning how the Mass is to be celebrated and how the Eucharist is to be treated. It focuses on liturgical abuses that have been occurring in recent years—sadly, mostly within the U.S. churches.

The following are some brief excerpts from the document for our catechetical faith formation:

- **Who has the authority to regulate the liturgy?**

The regulation of the sacred liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church [not individual priests or deacons], which rests specifically with the Apostolic See and, according to the norms of law, with the bishop (SC 22 §1).

- **Can any lay person serve in a special ministry role at Mass? Sometimes at a parish there have been people tasked with reading the sacred scriptures or serving in other roles, who are in irregular marital situations [e.g., invalid marriages outside the Church] or who openly advocate positions which are contrary to the Church’s moral teachings [e.g., they use contraception; etc.].**

The lay Christian faithful, called to give assistance at liturgical celebrations, should be well instructed and must be those whose Christian life, morals, and fidelity to the Church’s magisterium recommend them. It is fitting that such a one should have received a liturgical formation in accordance with his or her age, condition, state of life, and religious culture. No one should be selected whose designation could cause consternation for the faithful (46).

- **People cross the aisles to exchange the Sign of Peace and ushers go up and down the aisles extending it to people in each pew all over the Church. Should this happen?**

It is appropriate “that each [person] give the sign of peace only to those who are nearest and in a sober manner.” “The priest may give the sign of peace to the ministers but always remains within the sanctuary, so as not to disturb the celebration. He [may for just reason [such as during a funeral, a wedding, or when civic leaders are present]] extend the sign of peace to some few of the faithful” (72; cf. GIRM 82; IGMR 154).

- **Sometimes people whom I know are not Catholic take Communion. What does the Church say about this?**

When Holy Mass is celebrated for a large crowd—for example, at funerals where people of multiple faith denominations gather together—care should be taken lest out of ignorance non-Catholics or even non-Christians come forward for Holy Communion, without taking into account the Church’s magisterium in matters pertaining to doctrine and discipline. It is the duty

of pastors at an opportune moment to inform those present of the authenticity and the discipline that are strictly to be observed (84).

- **What is the proper posture for receiving Communion, and do you have to make a sign of reverence first?**

When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the body of the Lord from the minister. The consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant. When Holy Communion is received under both kinds, the sign of reverence is also made before receiving from the chalice of the precious blood (GIRM 160). [Likewise, if the communicant refrains from partaking of the precious blood (for medical reasons (flu or medications) for example), a sign of reverence is also to be made before passing the minister with the chalice.]

- **Should a person who is taking the Eucharist to a sick person go directly to the sick person or is it okay for him to do other things first (e.g., go to Walmart or Safeway)?**

A priest or deacon, or an extraordinary minister who takes the Most Holy Eucharist when an ordained minister is absent or impeded in order to administer it as Communion for a sick person, should go insofar as possible directly from the place where the sacrament is reserved to the sick person's home, ... [so that] the greatest reverence for the body of Christ may be ensured (133).

- **Is it okay to pray the rosary before the Blessed Sacrament (during a Holy Hour)?**

The principal purpose of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament is to pray directly with and before Christ either in the monstrance on the altar or within the tabernacle. In other words, benediction and adoration are for the purpose of giving our attention to the worship of Christ the Lord. Most notably within the U.S. the praying of the rosary before the Most Holy Sacrament, which is admirable "in its simplicity and even its profundity," is not required however. If there is exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, the character of the rosary prayer—as a contemplation of the mystery of the life of Christ, the Redeemer and the Almighty Father's design of salvation—should be emphasized, especially by making use of readings taken from Sacred Scripture (137; cf. Apostolic Letter (Rosarium Virginiae Mariae) 2)

- **Can I come into the Church to offer a "private" Holy Hour?**

Yes. Normally, during a scheduled Holy Hour, the Blessed Sacrament is placed in a monstrance on the altar. *"The ordinary minister for exposition of the Eucharist is a priest or deacon. At the end of the period of adoration, before reposition [back in the tabernacle], he blesses the people with the sacrament. In the absence of a priest or deacon or, if they are lawfully impeded, an acolyte, another extraordinary minister of communion [EMHC], or another person appointed by the local Ordinary [the bishop] may publicly expose and later repose the holy Eucharist for the adoration of the faithful."* (SR: U.S. Order for the Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist, #26, USCC) Outside of such instances, the parish faithful are always invited to come and spend time with our Lord Jesus reposed in the locked, tabernacle. Whether exposed on the altar or within the locked, tabernacle, we are in the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

(SR: <http://www.catholic.com/documents/liturgical-abuses>)