

Vatican instruction on the Eucharist to avoid abuses

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On April 23, 2004, Cardinal Francis Arinze, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, presented, in the Vatican, a 70-page instruction entitled "Redemptionis Sacramentum", on "certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist." In his encyclical letter "[Eucharistia de Ecclesia](#)," published in 2003, Pope John Paul II announced this document, which is aimed at putting an end to abuses against the Eucharist, "which have been a source of suffering for many." "No one is permitted to undervalue the mystery entrusted to our hands," the Holy Father added. Here are some important excerpts from this new instruction:

The Eucharistic Prayer

[51.] Only those Eucharistic Prayers are to be used which are found in the Roman Missal or are legitimately approved by the Apostolic See, and according to the manner and the terms set forth by it. "It is not to be tolerated that some Priests take upon themselves the right to compose their own Eucharistic Prayers" or to change the same texts approved by the Church, or to introduce others composed by private individuals.

[52.] The proclamation of the Eucharistic Prayer, which by its very nature is the climax of the whole celebration, is proper to the Priest by virtue of his Ordination. It is therefore an abuse to proffer it in such a way that some parts of the Eucharistic Prayer are recited by a Deacon, a lay minister, or by an individual member of the faithful, or by all members of the faithful together. The Eucharistic Prayer, then, is to be recited by the Priest alone in full.

The homily

[64.] The homily, which is given in the course of the celebration of Holy Mass and is a part of the Liturgy itself, [142] "should ordinarily be given by the Priest celebrant himself. He may entrust it to a concelebrating Priest or occasionally, according to circumstances, to a Deacon, but never to a lay person. In particular cases and for a just cause, the homily may even be given by a Bishop or a Priest who is present at the celebration but cannot concelebrate."

[74.] If the need arises for the gathered faithful to be given instruction or testimony by a lay person in a Church concerning the Christian life, it is altogether preferable that this be done outside Mass...

Not a meal, not a show

[77.] The celebration of Holy Mass is not to be inserted in any way into the setting of a common meal, nor joined with this kind of banquet. Mass is not to be celebrated without grave necessity on a dinner table nor in a dining room or banquet hall, nor in a room where food is present, nor in a place where the participants during the celebration itself are seated at tables. If out of grave necessity Mass must be celebrated in the same place where eating will later take place, there is to be a clear interval of time between the conclusion of Mass and the beginning of the meal, and ordinary food is not to be set before the faithful during the celebration of Mass.

[78.] It is not permissible to link the celebration of Mass to political or secular events, nor to situations that are not fully consistent with the Magisterium of the Catholic Church. Furthermore, it is altogether to be avoided that the celebration of Mass should be carried out merely out of a desire for show, or in the manner of other ceremonies including profane ones, lest the Eucharist should be emptied of its authentic meaning.

[79.] Finally, it is strictly to be considered an abuse to introduce into the celebration of Holy Mass elements that are contrary to the prescriptions of the liturgical books and taken from the rites of other religions.

Dispositions for the reception of Holy Communion



[80.] The Eucharist is to be offered to the faithful, among other reasons, "as an antidote, by which we are freed from daily faults and preserved from mortal sins", as is brought to light in various parts of the Mass. As for the Penitential Act placed at the beginning of Mass, it has the purpose of preparing all to be ready to celebrate the sacred mysteries; even so, "it lacks the efficacy of the



Sacrament of Penance”, and cannot be regarded as a substitute for the Sacrament of Penance in remission of graver sins. Pastors of souls should take care to ensure diligent catechetical instruction, so that Christian doctrine is handed on to Christ's faithful in this matter.

[83.] It is certainly best that all who are participating in the celebration of Holy Mass with the necessary dispositions should receive Communion. Nevertheless, it sometimes happens that Christ's faithful approach the altar as a group indiscriminately. It pertains to the Pastors prudently and firmly to correct such an abuse.

[87.] The First Communion of children must always be preceded by sacramental confession and absolution. Moreover, First Communion should always be administered by a Priest, and never outside the

celebration of Mass.

The distribution of Holy Communion

[91.] It is not licit to deny Holy Communion to any of Christ's faithful solely on the grounds, for example, that the person wishes to receive the Eucharist kneeling or standing.

[92.] Although each of the faithful always has the right to receive Holy Communion on the tongue, at his choice, if any communicant should wish to receive the Sacrament in the hand, in areas where the Bishops' Conference with the *recognitio* of the Apostolic See has given permission, the sacred host is to be administered to him or her. However, special care should be taken to ensure that the host is consumed by the communicant in the presence of the minister, so that no one goes away carrying the Eucharistic species in his hand. If there is a risk of profanation, then Holy Communion should not be given in the hand to the faithful.

[93.] The Communion-plate for the Communion of the faithful should be retained, so as to avoid the danger of the sacred host, or some fragment of it, falling.

[94.] It is not licit for the faithful “to take... by themselves... and, still less, to hand... from one to another” the sacred host or the sacred chalice. Moreover, in this regard, the abuse is to be set aside whereby spouses administer Holy Communion to each other at a Nuptial Mass.

[104.] The communicant must not be permitted to intinct (*dip*) the host himself in the chalice, nor to receive the intincted host in the hand...

[112.] Mass is celebrated either in Latin or in another language, provided that liturgical texts are used which have been approved according to the norm of law. Except in the case of celebrations of the Mass that are scheduled by the ecclesiastical authorities to take place in the language of the people, Priests are always and everywhere permitted to celebrate Mass in Latin.

Extraordinary functions of lay faithful

[151.] Only out of true necessity is there to be recourse to the assistance of extraordinary ministers in the celebration of the Liturgy. Such recourse is not intended for the sake of a fuller participation of the laity but rather, by its very nature, is supplementary and provisional.

[154.] As has already been recalled, “the only minister who can confect the Sacrament of the Eucharist in persona Christi is a validly ordained Priest.” Hence the name “minister of the Eucharist” belongs properly to the Priest alone. Moreover, also by reason of their sacred Ordination, the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion are the Bishop, the Priest and the Deacon, to whom it belongs therefore to administer Holy Communion to the lay members of Christ's faithful during the celebration of Mass. In this way their ministerial office in the Church is fully and accurately brought to light, and the sign value of the Sacrament is made complete.

[157.] If there is usually present a sufficient number of sacred ministers for the distribution of Holy Communion, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion may not be appointed. Indeed, in such circumstances, those who may have already been appointed to this ministry should not exercise it. The practice of those Priests is reprobated who, even though present at the celebration, abstain from distributing Communion, and hand this function over to lay persons.

[158.] Indeed, the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may administer Communion only when the Priest and Deacon are lacking, when the Priest is prevented by weakness or advanced age or some other genuine reason, or when the number of faithful coming to Communion is so great that the very celebration of Mass would be unduly prolonged. This, however, is to be understood in such a way that a brief prolongation, considering the circumstances and culture of the place, is not at all a sufficient reason.

This instruction, prepared by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments by mandate of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II in collaboration with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, was approved by the same Pontiff on the Solemnity of St. Joseph, 19 March 2004, and he ordered it to be published and to be observed immediately by all concerned.

From the offices of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Rome, on the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, March 25, 2004

Francis Card. Arinze, Prefect

This article is also available in the form of an 8-page leaflet (with the articles “[Encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II on the Eucharist](#)” and “[The Eucharistic Miracle of Lanciano, Italy](#)”).

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