



CHANCERY OFFICE

DIOCESE OF RAPID CITY

November 1, 2023
Solemnity of All Saints

PASTORAL LETTER CONCERNING COMMUNION UNDER BOTH SPECIES

As we enter this second year of our Eucharistic Revival, our diocese has been seeking various ways to invigorate Eucharistic fervor within the lives of our individual parishes. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, many of our pastors have been regularly asked about returning to the practice of offering the Precious Blood to the faithful at Mass. Before immediately returning to the practice, however, I wanted to take the opportunity to study the historical, spiritual, and theological significance of the faithful's reception from the Chalice. Having taken the opportunity to do so, I would like to present its most essential aspects to you here, and introduce our newly written diocesan policy and practice.

Before doing so, however, it might be worth highlighting some aspects of our Catholic understanding of the Mass - our access to the Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ. These very events of our Savior's life are made present in an unbloody and sacramental way at every celebration of the Mass, so that we might remain contemporary with the events of our salvation. It is for this reason that Christ gave us the Eucharist on the night He was betrayed, and commanded us to celebrate it faithfully in memory of Him. At the Last Supper, Christ gave us the Eucharist and instituted His apostles as his first priests, responsible for being its stewards. Through the hands of His priests, Christ continues to touch the lives of His faithful at each reception of Holy Communion. When the Eucharist is faithfully received, each communicant participates in the Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ. Faithful to His command, the Church has always offered the Body and Blood of our Savior at Mass. This fidelity, however, has not always employed the same ritual structure, and has undergone some changes and developments throughout the centuries, especially in relation to the practice of offering the Chalice to the faithful at Mass.

In the earliest days of the Church, there seemed to be a common practice of offering both Eucharistic species (i.e. under the *forms* of both bread and wine) to the faithful. Over time, however, this practice gradually became less and less frequent, until it virtually disappeared around the 12th Century.

While the Chalice was practically never offered to all the faithful during Mass, there were some good reasons as to why it decreased in availability. Most importantly, the depth and enrichment of Eucharistic theology developed over the centuries, one element of which was the doctrine of *concomitance*. This doctrine, which must be held by all the faithful, teaches that the

entire Christ is present, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity within each Eucharistic species. The Church, through her theologians, came to understand that because Christ's Eucharistic presence is entirely dependent upon His presence in heaven (which is undivided), He must be present in the Eucharist as He is present in heaven. Being integral and undivided at the right hand of His Father, so too Christ's Body and Blood cannot be separated or divided in the Eucharist. Rather, the whole Christ is present within each Eucharistic element.

Consequently, a person who receives only one species without the other does not receive less of Christ, nor one part of Christ at the exclusion of any other, nor even less grace, than a person who receives both species. After understanding the consequences of this doctrine, the Church slowly ceased to offer the Chalice to the lay faithful for practical reasons, not the least of which was the fact that spilling the Precious Blood is much more likely and more difficult to purify than the dropping of the Body of Christ.

A few centuries later, many early Protestant theologians rejected belief in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist (and consequently, the doctrine of concomitance as well), thereby insisting that the Chalice be offered to all the lay faithful at every celebration. So as to not confuse liturgical practices with those who publicly rebelled against the Catholic Faith, the Church's response to these theologians at the Council of Trent determined that it was inopportune to return to the early Church practice of offering the Chalice to all the faithful.

More recently, the Second Vatican Council, and the liturgical documents that followed, encouraged that the Church restore the practice of offering the Precious Blood to the faithful during some of the most important celebrations of Mass within the liturgical year. And in fact, these same documents extended widely the faculty of the Diocesan Bishop to establish norms for Communion under both species for his own diocese, as he sees pastorally appropriate.

Like other liturgical practices in recent years, however, the offering of the Chalice to the faithful seemed to go beyond what was called for within the Church's liturgical documents written during and after the Second Vatican Council (including the above-mentioned extension of the Diocesan Bishop's faculty from the Apostolic See). What was intended to only happen on special occasions became the norm in every occasion. Many parishes throughout the United States, even in our own diocese, offered the Precious Blood to everyone at every Mass. While this change was doubtlessly well-intended, it oftentimes failed to consider the following liturgical principles:

- (1) The Principle of Progressive Solemnity: By their very nature, those liturgies of the greatest solemnity within the liturgical year demand a higher and more ceremonious ritual form than other liturgies and will, therefore, contain various ritual elements that are not usually included in more common celebrations. We see this principle at work throughout our liturgical year. For instance: Daily Masses are shorter and less ceremonious than Sunday Masses. Masses within the Octave of Easter are more solemn than Masses in Ordinary Time. These varying degrees of solemnity allow the less-catechized to intuit the importance of each respective celebration.

(2) Practical reverence for and protection of the Precious Blood: The accident rate for spilling the Precious Blood during distribution is, relatively speaking, much greater than that for the Body of Christ. Unfortunately, many of us have memories of the Precious Blood being spilt. Such an accident is more difficult to reverently purify than the dropping of a Host. As small as the risk might be, it is an unnecessary one to take at every Mass.

(3) Reinforcement of the Catholic doctrine of *concomitance*: It is not infrequent that Pastors hear their parishioners discuss the Eucharist in a way that evidences a certain ignorance of the doctrine of concomitance. While a deficiency in catechesis about Eucharistic theology is primarily the cause of this error, it is not difficult to see how insisting that the Precious Blood be offered to everyone at every Mass could also foster this misunderstanding. Rather than giving the communicant “more Jesus,” reception from the Chalice offers another or a different opportunity to receive the same Eucharistic Lord Who was already fully received within the Consecrated Host.

(4) The distinction between *Ordinary Ministers of Holy Communion* and *Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion*: The distribution of Holy Communion is something that pertains to the very nature of ordained ministry. It is for this reason that the hands of the priest are consecrated with Sacred Chrism during the rite of his ordination. Deacons are given a share in this ministry by virtue of their calling to “serve at table” and “assist in the daily distribution” (cf. Acts 6:1-7). For this reason, the Church considers these ordained men to be those who ordinarily distribute the Eucharist. Only in extraordinary circumstances, when the Ordinary Ministers are unable to distribute Holy Communion, the Church allows for lay men and women to be used or even installed as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC). For example, at Eucharistic celebrations where there are particularly large numbers of the faithful, and which would be excessively prolonged because of an insufficient number of ordained ministers to distribute Holy Communion, there may be a place for EMHC’s. There may also be a valid role for them to bring the ciboria to and from the tabernacle, depending on its location, at the Pastor’s discretion.

This is not to say that EMHC’s do not have a valuable ministry within the life of the Church. Their ministry is very much appreciated and welcome. Well-formed and deputed EMHC’s will continue to serve in the diocese, even if they are not called into service at every liturgical celebration. In fact, another of the ways their ministry is greatly appreciated and needed is in bringing Holy Communion to the sick and homebound.

Therefore, in keeping with the directives contained within the Church’s various liturgical books and documents, and in consideration of the four principles listed above, the practice of offering the Precious Blood is *encouraged* in the following liturgical celebrations:

- All the faithful who participate in the Easter Vigil, especially the newly baptized;
- All the faithful present at the celebration of an ordination;
- All the faithful present at a Mass wherein a religious person makes his/her first or renewed religious profession;

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- All the faithful present at a Mass wherein a virgin is consecrated;
- The bride and groom celebrating their Nuptial Mass or jubilee;
- In the administration of Viaticum, to the sick person and to all who are present when Mass is celebrated in the house of the sick person;
- Members of communities at the Conventual Mass or the “community” Mass, along with seminarians, and all those engaged in a retreat or taking part in a spiritual or pastoral gathering;
- Those who are receiving their First Holy Communion.

It is, furthermore, *left to the discretion of each Pastor* to distribute the Precious Blood to all the faithful present at the following celebrations:

- The Christmas Mass During the Night;
- The Chrism Mass;
- Those who participate in the Holy Thursday, Mass of the Lord’s Supper;
- Divine Mercy Sunday;
- The Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord;
- The Solemnity of Pentecost;
- The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity;
- The Solemnity of The Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ;
- The Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus;
- Mass with the Rite of Confirmation;
- The Mass celebrating the patronal feast of each oratory, church, parish, or mission;
- The anniversary Mass celebrating the dedication of each church.

To be sure, it is a wonderful gift for the whole Church to have her faithful people receive the Precious Blood of Christ from the Chalice at Mass. Such a practice is in fact a fuller sign of the Eucharistic banquet, and it adds greater solemnity to the liturgy. It is my sincere desire that everyone receive from the Chalice as often as it is available.

While perhaps this change in policy will not be entirely welcomed by all, it is my firm belief that this policy is as close as possible to the expressed mind of the Church. It is from Her that we receive the Eucharist, and it is therefore fitting that we observe and honor Her preference. May these opportunities to receive the Precious Blood of our Savior deepen our love for the Eucharist.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Peter M. Muhich
Bishop of Rapid City