

Liturgical Adjustments and Updates

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When I was growing up our household followed specific guidelines which included dinner times together, certain household chores, and making sure that we let everyone know where we were at all times! Oh, these so-called “rules” were not all that difficult to follow even if, at times, they seemed to intrude on ones daily schedule. And, as we matured we came to understand and to value the wisdom in having a structured frame of reference. Was it like that for you as well?

Today, as in the past, the Catholic Church has set guidelines or what we might call norms, that help us know and understand what is expected of us as we strive to practice our faith. Specifically, in the sacred Liturgy, the Church asks us to follow certain liturgical norms so as to allow each and every one of us to know what to do in the Mass and when to do it. In this way our experience of being one body in Christ is both manifested and interiorized.

The Mass, as we know, is the enactment of Christ’s Paschal Mystery: his suffering, dying, and rising. This never changes! However, the ways in which we, the body of Christ, participate in this Divine Event can continue to be expressed by the addition, for example, of new postures or with the refinement of liturgical language.

What Sources Inform Us?

In the more than forty years since the close of the Second Vatican Council, we have received many documents and liturgical directives that help us know what to do during the Mass and *why*. While at times we may find “changes” or adjustments in the Liturgy challenging, we are reassured in knowing that the Church is always seeking ways to deepen our liturgical experience. Two documents that are most helpful are the recently revised *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* 2002 (GIRM) and the 2004 Instruction, *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (RS), both of which are available on-line. These, like all post-Vatican II liturgical documents, rely upon the information contained in the dogmatic *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* which was published in 1965.

Recent Liturgical Adjustments at OMC Parish

No doubt you have noticed over the years some big and small adjustments in the sacred Liturgy here in our own parish. These “changes” are, for the most part, universal. As the Church continues to look at specific ministries, for example, she seeks to refine them – not for the sake of expediency necessarily, but so that the beautiful and significant theology that is expressed in and through the ministry can be better exemplified. You will notice, for example, that since the Responsorial Psalm is scripture, taken directly and exactly from the *Lectioary*, it is now sung by the cantor at the pulpit (ambo). Likewise, such postures as bowing the head before receiving the Precious Body and the Precious Blood are now commonplace, whereby each communicant as members of the one body express a specific gesture of reverence to Our Lord. The most recent adjustment here at Our Mother of Consolation Parish, you will notice, is that carried out by the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (sometimes referred to as Eucharistic Ministers). First you will notice that when the bread and wine are carried in procession to the priest by

members of the lay faithful, the celebrant will immediately pour the wine from the flagon into the cups. The document, *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (7), which was published in 2003, explains that “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.” And so it is that, during the singing of the *Lamb of God*, the priest breaks the Eucharistic bread. Deacons and concelebrants may assist in this preparation as well. Exercising his role as presider (acting in the person of Christ the head), the priest then offers this invitation: *This is the Lamb of God. . . happy are those who are called . . .* (*GIRM*, 162). This invitation comes from Christ to all the faithful - including the Extraordinary Ministers who are one with the baptized waiting to hear it! All respond together with the priest, *Lord, I am not worthy to receive you . . .* As the priest receives the Precious Body and Blood, the Extraordinary Ministers then come forward and the Communion hymn begins (*GIRM*, 86). This represents a change since previously the Extraordinary Ministers would come forward during the Lamb of God with the idea that this was a time of general preparation for the distribution of Holy Communion. But something more important is being said when the entire assembly hears the invitation from the celebrant to the baptized of which the Extraordinary Minister is a member!

The singing of one hymn during the reception of Holy Communion supports the Church’s understanding that it is the entire assembly that participates in one another’s communion. Not only does this express the communicants’ union in spirit, but also “joy of heart and . . . the ‘communitarian’ nature of the procession to receive Communion”(*GIRM*, 86). This is the reason that the hymn continues until the last person receives (*GIRM*, 86). The singing continues for as long as the Sacrament is being administered. The Extraordinary Ministers of the Precious Body place the remnants on the altar while the ministers of the Precious Blood return their empty cup to the designated table. When the distribution of Communion is completed, the priest and faithful spend a period of time praying privately. If desired a psalm or hymn of praise may be sung by the choir or by the entire congregation.

As we continue to move forward here at Our Mother of Consolation parish, we rejoice in the opportunities to express what we believe as the corporate body of Christ. Perhaps we may wonder at times why any adjustments need to take place. But, possibly it is similar to our own experience of growing up with household structures. Only in time do we come to recognize the need for and the value of how these norms inform and deepen our appreciation for what IS. And, in this case, what we value most in our life as Catholics is the privilege of participating as one body at the table of the Lord.

