

Purification of Sacred Vessels by Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

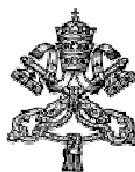
On October 13, 2006 Bishop William Skylstad, President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, informed all Bishop members of the conference that he had received a response to his request for an extension of an indult permitting extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to assist with the purification of sacred vessels at Mass.

In a recent letter to the Conference President, Cardinal Francis Arinze, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (Prot. no. 468/05/L), reported that he had brought the matter to the attention of our Holy Father on June 9, 2006 and received a response in the negative.

In this letter to all Bishop members of the USCCB, Bishop Skylstad noted that “as a result, it will be necessary to inform all pastors that Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may no longer assist with the purification of sacred vessels at Mass.” Cardinal Arinze’s letter is provided here for the benefit of our readers, as is a resource entitled “Seven Questions on Distribution of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds” to assist Bishops, pastors, diocesan and parish liturgists in the implementation of the Holy Father’s decision.

In public comments on the decision of the Holy Father, Bishop Donald Trautman, Chairman of the Committee on the Liturgy, recalled the conciliar mandate for more frequent reception of Holy Communion under both kinds as a fuller sign of the Eucharistic Banquet. While urging that the Holy Father’s decision be followed, he expressed his hope that each diocesan Bishop will continue to make full use of the authority granted him by the *Missale Romanum, editio typical tertia*, to foster the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds. Finally, he recalled the responsibility of each pastor to provide for the training of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion in Eucharistic theology, spirituality and liturgical practice and to instruct the faithful on the ecclesial nature of the Eucharist, the Eucharist as sacrifice and sacred banquet, the real presence of Christ in the eucharistic elements, the kinds of reverence due at all times to the sacrament, and the roles proper to ordinary and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion.¹

¹ Cf. *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under both Kinds*, no. 25.



CONGREGATIO CULTO DIVINO ET DISCIPLINA SACRAMENTORUM

Prot. n. 468/05/L

Rome, 12 October 2006

Your Excellency,

I refer to your letters of 9 March 2005 and 7 March 2006, in which, in the name of the Conference of Bishops of which you are President, you requested a renewal of the indult for extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to purify the sacred vessels after Mass, where there are not enough priests or deacons to purify a large number of chalices that might be used at Mass.

I have put the whole matter before the Holy Father in an audience which he granted me on 9 June 2006, and received instructions to reply as follows:

1. There is no doubt that "the sign of Communion is more complete when given under both kinds, since in that form the sign of the Eucharistic meal appears more clearly" (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 240; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 390).
2. Sometimes, however, the high number of communicants may render it inadvisable for everyone to drink from the chalice (cf. *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, no. 102). Intinction with reception on the tongue always and everywhere remains a legitimate option, by virtue of the general liturgical law of the Roman Rite.
3. Catechesis of the people is important regarding the teaching of the Council of Trent that Christ is fully present under each of the species. Communion under the species of the bread alone, as a consequence, makes it possible to receive all the fruit of Eucharistic grace (cf. *Denzinger-Schönmetzer*, no. 1729; *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, nos. 11, 282). "For pastoral reasons", therefore, "this manner of receiving Communion has been legitimately established as the most common form in the Latin rite" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 390).
4. Paragraph 279 of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* directs that the sacred vessels are to be purified by the priest, the deacon or an instituted acolyte. The status of this text as legislation has recently been clarified by the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts. It does not seem feasible, therefore, for the Congregation to grant the requested indult from this directive in the general law of the Latin Church.
5. This letter is therefore a request to the members of the Bishops' Conference of the United States of America to prepare the necessary explanations and catechetical materials for your clergy and people so that henceforth the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 279, as found in the *editio typicatia* of the *Roman Missal*, will be observed throughout its territories.

With the expression of my esteem and fraternal greetings, I remain, Your Excellency,

Devotedly yours in Christ,

+Francis Cardinal Arinze
Prefect

Monsignor Mario Marini
Under-Secretary

Seven Questions on the Distribution of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds

1. Why did the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council recommend the distribution of Holy Communion under Both Kinds?

“The Council's decision [in 1963] to restore Holy Communion under both kinds at the bishop's discretion took expression in the first edition of the *Missale Romanum* and enjoys an even more generous application in the third typical edition of the *Missale Romanum*: ‘Holy Communion has a more complete form as a sign when it is received under both kinds. For in this manner of reception a fuller sign of the Eucharistic banquet shines forth. Moreover there is a clearer expression of that will by which the new and everlasting covenant is ratified in the blood of the Lord and of the relationship of the Eucharistic banquet to the eschatological banquet in the Father's kingdom.’”²

“From the first days of the Church's celebration of the Eucharist, Holy Communion consisted of the reception of both species in fulfillment of the Lord's command to ‘take and eat . . . take and drink.’ The distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful under both kinds was thus the norm for more than a millennium of Catholic liturgical practice.”³ “The practice of Holy Communion under both kinds at Mass continued until the late eleventh century, when the custom of distributing the Eucharist to the faithful under the form of bread alone began to grow. By the twelfth century theologians such as Peter Cantor speak of Communion under one kind as a “custom” of the Church. This practice spread until the Council of Constance in 1415 decreed that Holy Communion under the form of bread alone would be distributed to the faithful.”⁴

2. What preparation of the faithful is required before the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds?

“For the faithful who take part in the rite or are present at it, pastors should take care to call to mind as appropriately as possible Catholic teaching according to the Council of Trent on the manner of Communion. Above all they should instruct the Christian faithful that, according to Catholic faith, Christ, whole and entire, as well as the true Sacrament are received under one kind only; that, therefore, as far as the effects are concerned, those who receive in this manner are not deprived of any grace necessary for salvation.”⁵

3. What resources can assist in this preparation?

Norms for the *Distribution of Holy Communion under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America*⁶ were approved by the Bishops of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and confirmed by the Holy See in 2002. Part I of these Norms (*Holy Communion: The Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus*) provides a summary of the Church's teaching on Holy Communion which can aid in the preparation of ministers and faithful in preparing to receive Holy Communion under Both Kinds. Likewise, the USCCB pamphlet “Real Presence of Jesus

² *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds for the Dioceses of the United States of America* (Norms), no. 20, citing *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM), no. 281.

³ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC), no. 55, Cf. Norms, no. 17.

⁴ Norms, no. 18.

⁵ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM), no. 281, cf. *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (RS), no. 100.

⁶ http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/current/norms.shtml#N_30_#N_30_

Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist”⁷ may be helpful in such formation. Both texts are available online in English and Spanish or from USCCB Publications.⁸

4. When Holy Communion is distributed under both kinds, what happens to what remains of the Precious Blood?

“When more of the Precious Blood remains than was necessary for Communion, and if not consumed by the bishop or priest celebrant, the deacon immediately and reverently consumes at the altar all of the Blood of Christ which remains; he may be assisted, if needs dictate, by other deacons and priests. When there are extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, they may consume what remains of the Precious Blood from their chalice of distribution with permission of the diocesan bishop.”⁹

5. Who then purifies the sacred vessels?

As ordinary ministers of Holy Communion, the Priest and the Deacon purify the sacred vessels. The instituted acolyte, by reason of his office, “helps the priest or deacon to purify and arrange the sacred vessels.”¹⁰ In the Dioceses of the United States of America, the ministry of instituted acolyte, which is open only to men, is primarily made up of those preparing to receive Holy Orders.¹¹

6. May an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion assist in the purification of sacred vessels?

In accord with the Holy Father’s recent decision, as reported in Cardinal Arinze’s letter of October 12, 2006 (Prot. no. 468/05/L), an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion may not assist in the purification of sacred vessels. This extraordinary ministry was created exclusively for those instances where there are not enough ordinary ministers to distribute Holy Communion, due to the consummate importance of assuring that the faithful have the opportunity to receive Holy Communion at Mass, even when it is distributed under both species. (cf. RS, no. 102)

7. What about those instances where there are many chalices and only one Priest to purify them?

When there are insufficient Priests, Deacons, or instituted acolytes to purify the additional chalices during Mass, the purification may take place immediately after the Mass has concluded. If such purification by ordinary ministers proves pastorally problematic, consideration should be given to distribution of Holy Communion by intinction or to the distribution of Holy Communion under the form of consecrated bread alone.¹² Priests should also keep in mind potential health risks associated with intinction, especially in the coming flu season.

⁷ <http://www.usccbpublishing.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=596>

⁸ www.usccbpublishing.com

⁹ Norms, no. 52.

¹⁰ GIRM, no. 192.

¹¹ Cf. GIRM, nos. 98, and 187-193.

¹² cf. RS, no. 102.