



Office of the
Archbishop

Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA

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2 February 2009

Feast of the Presentation

On Distribution of the Eucharist Outside of Mass

Dearly beloved Priests, Deacons, and Laity of the Archdiocese,

On many occasions, the request has been made to reconsider the policy on the use of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion in the Archdiocese for the Military Services. I appreciate the concerns that have been raised and am not insensitive to the needs of our unusual archdiocese present in several other Nations and deployed in many places.

However, in addition to the reflections already so carefully and diligently presented by my predecessor, the Most Reverend Edwin O'Brien on Holy Thursday, 2007, I feel compelled to illustrate a number of considerations frequently ignored in the requests I have received.

The Catholic Church holds that the Eucharist is the “source and summit” of its life of faith. We are a Eucharistic community, which means a community that gathers for and celebrates the Eucharist. That is a unique moment when we are able to be present with Jesus Christ in His supreme act of consummating the one Sacrifice, which saves us all. The celebration allows us to participate in that sublime moment when the Lord obtained for us what we were unable to obtain for ourselves. That does not mean that we are a community that merely receives Holy Communion. To separate Holy Communion from the celebration of the Eucharist on a regular basis vitiates that essential link.

To quote Archbishop O'Brien: “There can be no Eucharist without the priesthood, in the same way there can be no priesthood without the Eucharist.”¹ No other liturgical or para-liturgical rite can duplicate the celebration of Eucharist—because only in the Mass is Christ's saving sacrifice offered. It is in the Mass—through the ministry of priests—that the work of our redemption is definitively carried out.”²

Many practical consequences flow from that general principle. One argument frequently raised is that Catholics who gather for a Sunday celebration without a priest when Holy Communion is not distributed soon falter and begin to attend other Christian services. The Catholic Church does not use Holy Communion as a lure to keep them in the community. That would not be a valid use of the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. The better response is to improve the formation of lay leaders so that the celebration without a priest is more attractive and better planned. In fact, with the help of an Army chaplain and the publishers of *The Word Among Us*, I am in the process of improving the materials available for use by the faithful of the archdiocese.

“Any practice in regard to the Eucharist that gives the impression that the act of receiving Holy Communion can be radically divorced from either the sacrifice of the Mass or the ministry of the priest who offers the sacrifice threatens to distort in a most serious way the proper understanding and the essential meaning of this Most Holy Sacrament.”³

¹ Pope John Paul II, “Gift and Mystery: On the Fiftieth Anniversary of My Priestly Ordination, New York: Doubleday, 1966 (page 77).

² Edwin F. O'Brien, Holy Thursday Letter, 2007

³ Ibid.

A second practical consideration is the spiritual preparation for Holy Communion. How will the participants be able to confess their sins and be absolved? Who will remind them of the importance of being in a state of grace before approaching Holy Communion? These are essential and not secondary elements for our consideration, as we try to respond to these genuine sacramental needs.

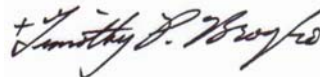
Thirdly, the link between the celebration of the Eucharist and reservation of the Sacrament dictates that the Eucharist not be reserved for more than a few weeks without being renewed. Most of the situations presented to this office, do not foresee a priest's visit to the place of reservation every few weeks. Again, the link between the sacrifice of the Mass and the reservation of Holy Communion demands that there be a frequent celebration wherever the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. Holy Communion is also real food; it is the central element in the sacrificial Banquet. It should be "served" fresh and not many weeks after it has been consecrated.

Finally, we cannot minimize the risk that the presence of an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion with the reserved sacrament will be interpreted as an excuse not to ensure the regular presence of a priest. It is not foreign to my experience that many outside the Catholic Faith are under the impression that providing Holy Communion through an extraordinary minister satisfies the Sunday requirements for Catholics. Many have even taken that as an excuse to not recruit priests or not to ask nearby priest-chaplains to attend to the Catholics in their units because their Lay Leaders or Chaplain Assistants can distribute Holy Communion. Allowing such a practice to continue can be very detrimental and even counterproductive to our need for line support in the recruitment of priests and to the prevalent attitude that "a chaplain of any faith" can provide for our Catholic people. On the contrary, they have a right to the celebration of the sacraments—all of them!

For all of these reasons, it is my decision not to alter the dispositions established by Archbishop O'Brien, which I have reprinted below to facilitate your consultation. They clearly make manifest the faith of the Church and the central place of the Eucharistic celebration in that Church. I am deeply grateful to those who have manifested their concern, and I do suffer for them in their inability to receive Holy Communion. May their hunger for the Bread of Life be an inspiration for a more fervent prayer in the Archdiocese for an increase in vocations to the Priesthood and for more priests in the Armed Services.

Invoking the blessing of Almighty God upon all of you, I remain

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Timothy P. Broglio". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

(Most Reverend) Timothy P. Broglio
Archbishop for the Military Services



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On Holy Communion Outside of Mass Holy Thursday, 2007

The Uniqueness of the Sacrifice of the Mass¹

In his encyclical “*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*” (“The Church from the Eucharist,” promulgated on Holy Thursday, 2003), His Holiness Pope John Paul II wrote that “at every celebration of the Eucharist, we are spiritually brought back to the Paschal Triduum—to the events of Holy Thursday, to the Last Supper and what followed it.”²

Every celebration of the Mass makes present on our altars by the ministry of the priest the events of our Savior’s death and resurrection—really, truly, here and now. These are the events of Christ’s self-offering to the Father, an offering He made so that we might be saved from our sins.³

The Sacrifice of Christ Made Present

Our Lord’s sacrificial self-offering “is so decisive for the salvation of the human race that Jesus Christ offered it and returned it (offered and returned His sacrifice) to the Father only *after He had left us a means of sharing in it* as if we had been present there”⁴ at the events of Holy Week. In each Mass, we share in Christ’s sacrifice not simply because the once and for all sacrifice of the Cross is made present in the here and now⁵ but also because “when the Church celebrates the Eucharist... ‘the work of our redemption is carried out’”⁶ here and now. Being present at a celebration of the Eucharist is no different—at least as far as our salvation is concerned—than being present at the death and resurrection of Jesus.

As John Cardinal Newman presented the mystery involved in every sacrament:

“Time and space have no portion in the spiritual Kingdom which He has founded; and the rites of His Church are as mysterious spells by which He annuls them both.... Thus, Christ shines through them, as through transparent bodies, without impediment.”⁷

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, our use of “Eucharist” in this letter refers to the offering of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The terms Blessed Sacrament or Holy Communion refer to the Real Presence of Christ outside the Mass.

² *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 3

³ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 606ff

⁴ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 11.

⁵ Cf. Hebr. 7: 27; Cf. Catechism, 1364.

⁶ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 11.

⁷ Parochial Sermons III, 277-278.

The Eucharistic Sacrifice, then, is the “source and summit of the Christian life”⁸ precisely because it is a re-presentation of the dying and rising of Christ, the Paschal Mystery. In this Sacrifice all the riches of the Church are contained.

The Mass: A Communal Act

The Mass celebrates Christ’s redeeming presence in the community of the faithful. In the words of the *Catechism*:

“Those who receive the Eucharist are united more closely to Christ. Through it Christ unites them to all the faithful in one body - the Church. Communion renews, strengthens, and deepens this incorporation into the Church, already achieved by Baptism. In Baptism we have been called to form but one body. (Cf. *1Cor 12: 13*) The Eucharist fulfills this call: ‘*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*’ (*1Cor 10: 16-17*)”⁹

This participation is further emphasized by our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, as he describes our entering into Jesus’ act of self-oblation, of participating in the redeeming sacrifice, and experiencing the actions of the priest acting *in the person of Christ*.¹⁰

The Church, the Body of Christ

When we receive Holy Communion in the midst of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, we find our salvation not so much by a private act of receiving Christ’s Body and Blood but because in receiving we enter into the Communion of His Body, the Church,¹¹ and so enter into the Mystery of His dying and rising. When He instituted the Eucharist, “Jesus did not simply state that what He was giving them to eat and drink was His Body and His Blood; He also expressed *its sacrificial meaning* (Body given for you... Blood poured out for you) and made sacramentally present His sacrifice which would soon be offered on the Cross for the salvation of all.”¹²

So much is it the case that we are saved by being in communion with the Church—and so with Christ’s self-offering on the Cross—that St. Thomas Aquinas reminds us that unlike the other sacraments, the graces available to the faithful in the Holy Mass are made available not only to those who receive Holy Communion at Mass but to all members of the

⁸ Lumen Gentium, 11

⁹ Catechism, 1396.

¹⁰ Cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 11-13

¹¹ Cf. Catechism, 1382

¹² *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 12.

Church.¹³ That is, by “faith and charity” and by an act of spiritual communion, the faithful who are unable to be present at a celebration of the Mass may still receive the graces of the Mass—although in a different way than those who are present.¹⁴ And indeed, we can truly say that the saving graces that are won for the human race in Christ’s self-offering—and which are offered to the Father in every Mass—are the graces that offer us eternal salvation.

Eucharist and Priesthood

The priesthood, so intimately connected to the Eucharist, is a ministry that flows out of the Eucharist itself just as the Eucharist is brought about by the ministry of the priest.¹⁵ “There can be no Eucharist without the priesthood, in the same way there can be no priesthood without the Eucharist.”¹⁶ No other liturgical or para-liturgical rite can duplicate the celebration of Eucharist—because only in the Mass is Christ’s saving sacrifice offered. It is in the Mass—through the ministry of the priest—that the work of our redemption is definitively carried out.

No Divorce of Eucharist, Communion and Priest

Any practice in regard to the Eucharist that gives the impression that the act of receiving Holy Communion can be divorced from either the Sacrifice of the Mass or the ministry of the priest who offers the sacrifice threatens to distort in a most serious way the proper understanding and the essential meaning of this Most Holy Sacrament.

Priests, as ministers and custodians of the Eucharist, have an over-riding concern that the teaching and practice regarding the Eucharistic Sacrifice and Holy Communion fully reflect Church teaching and promote a sound Catholic spirituality.

Present Pastoral Concerns

Gradually, over the years and in many areas of the Archdiocese, the distribution of Holy Communion by the laity has become commonplace, so much so that the reception of Holy Communion separated from the celebration of the Mass and the ministry of the priest is all too often the norm rather than the exception. Other forms of prayer recommended by the Church when the Mass is unavailable are frequently little appreciated.

As a result, it might appear to some that the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion is an adequate replacement for the priest. In fact, there continue to be occasions when efforts to obtain a priest to celebrate Mass are not made, because a Communion Service is thought

¹³ Summa Theologica, third part, q79 a7

¹⁴ *ibid*, ad2

¹⁵ The Eucharist “is the principal and central *raison d’être*” of the priesthood. The pastoral charity that inspires, animates and gives unity to our priestly life and work “flows mainly from the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is the center and root of the whole priestly life.” (Second Vatican Council, Decree on Priesthood, Number 14)

¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, “Gift and Mystery: On the Fiftieth Anniversary of My Priestly Ordination,” New York: Doubleday, 1966 (page 77).

to be adequate. Some seem not to miss the celebration of Mass at all, as long as they can receive Holy Communion. *In short, the widespread and repeated distribution of Holy Communion outside of Mass diminishes appropriate regard for the centrality of the Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Catholic priesthood.*

In most circumstances, those of our lay people entrusted with the Blessed Sacrament are conscientious and reverent in carrying out their responsibilities. We thank them for their devotion and example. We hope they will continue to step forward for such service when there is judged to be a genuine need.

Unfortunately, however, and of greatest concern, are the repeated reports of the Blessed Sacrament being handled carelessly: reserved in inappropriate places, in the possession of unqualified individuals, lost and misplaced, and if found, uncertainty as to whether the elements are consecrated or not. This is sometimes the result of poorly trained lay ministers, the rugged conditions of military life or just plain carelessness. This is tantamount to the desecration of the Eucharist—a most serious matter that I must address.

Updated Archdiocesan Policy

Past attempts to locate the distribution of Holy Communion within a proper Catholic theology and to prevent the Blessed Sacrament from being sacrilegiously handled have proved largely unsuccessful. With this statement we are presenting Archdiocesan policy in allowing, in specific and limited circumstances, the distribution of Holy Communion by laypersons outside of or apart from the celebration of Holy Mass.

The four principles, which regulate this privilege if given, are:

1. **Real Necessity**—a priest is not available to celebrate Mass for at least three weeks and every effort has failed to find a priest.¹⁷
2. **Guaranteed Security**—the Blessed Sacrament is always kept in a secured and locked tabernacle. Only the Catholic chaplain and Catholic representative/lay leader will have access to the tabernacle.
3. **Appropriate Reverence**—only a Catholic deacon or a properly trained and certified lay person is permitted to remove the Blessed Sacrament from the tabernacle on the occasion of a Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest. Authorization for such a Celebration must be specifically requested to and can only be granted by the AMS Chancery Office.
4. **Specific Accountability**—the appropriate Catholic chaplain will be responsible for ensuring that all these conditions are met.

¹⁷ The Blessed Sacrament is not to be reserved, unconsumed, for more than three weeks, for fear of deterioration of the elements. (see Canon 934)

Spiritual Communion

This will mean that some of our faithful will not be able to receive Holy Communion as frequently as in the past. If we make this “Eucharistic sacrifice” conscientiously and generously, the Lord will not fail to offer us other graces, if we seek them from Him. Thus, the ancient practice of the Church of making a “Spiritual Communion” as mentioned earlier, is of great value. We thereby experience our membership and participation in the “Communion of the Saints.”

Suggested Forms of Catholic Sunday Observance

When Sunday Mass is not available, the Catholic faithful should be encouraged to gather with other Catholics in celebrating alternative forms of prayer recommended by the Church in these circumstances. These include the Liturgy of the Word of that Sunday; parts of the Liturgy of the Hours (the “Divine Office”); and other devotions that many of you will be more familiar with, such as the Holy Rosary, Stations of the Cross and forms of charismatic prayer. These popular devotions will be beneficial in strengthening both your personal relationship with the Lord and the Catholic identity you share with others, as you seek to deal with the challenging demands of today’s military life.

The Word

Ironically, our Catholic tradition’s respect for the awesome Mystery of the Eucharist and the 16th century’s reformers’ emphasis upon the Word of God at the expense of Mass, led to a *de facto* lessening of the importance of Word in its own right. The Second Vatican Council recognized this imbalance in its *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, noting the double table at Mass – one of the Word, the other of the Eucharist – from each of which our lives are nourished. The Council states further:

And such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigor and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting font of spiritual life (#21).

Throughout the Scripture when God speaks something happens – His Word never returns to Him void. This is true throughout history as well and on occasions where two or three gather to hear and share the Word of God.

Regrettably, there is still a tendency on the part of Catholics, to conclude that if the Mass or the reception of Holy Communion is unavailable on Sunday, there is nowhere to turn for spiritual sustenance. To correct this notion and to provide a rich resource for a prayerful communal celebration of Morning and Evening Prayer and of the Liturgy of the Word, the Church’s official ritual is available: *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest.*

Copies of the Bible and the New Testament are usually quite available throughout the military system. In addition, “*A Catholic Handbook for Military Personnel*” (which our Archdiocese has published in cooperation with the Knights of Columbus) offers a wide variety of prayers, hymns, and other opportunities for reflection and meditation by

individuals and groups. It is strongly recommend that all chaplains as well as Catholic lay leadership do whatever possible in an ongoing effort to put the Scriptures and the *Catholic Handbook* into the hands of our people.*

Our faithful should have available, as well, resource materials such as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, documents from the Holy See such as the encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. Additionally, websites, such as <http://www.SalvationHistory.com> offer valuable insights into the Sunday readings. These and similar resources can serve as useful texts for study groups.

Constant and fervent must be our prayer to the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth more laborers into his harvest in our Archdiocese so that there might indeed be more shepherds according to his Heart—and that the Eucharistic Sacrifice might be more widely available to our brave service men and women.

Given at the Chancery in Washington, District of Columbia, this 5th day of April 2007.

+Edwin F. O'Brien

The Most Reverend Edwin F. O'Brien
Archbishop for the Military Services, USA

* "... care must be taken to ensure that such assemblies in the absence of a priest do not encourage ecclesiological visions incompatible with the truth of the Gospel and the Church's tradition. Rather, they should be privileged moments of prayer for God to send holy priests after his own heart. It is touching, in this regard to read the words of Pope John Paul II in his Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday 1979 about those places where the faithful, deprived of a priest by a dictatorial regime, would meet in a church or shrine, place on the altar a stole which they still kept and recite the prayers of the eucharistic liturgy, halting in silence "at the moment that corresponds to the transubstantiation," as a sign of how "ardently they desire to hear the words that only the lips of a priest can efficaciously utter." (No. 10, AAS 71 (1979): 414-415) With this in mind, and considering the incomparable good which comes from the celebration of the Eucharist, I ask all priests to visit willingly and as often as possible the communities entrusted to their pastoral care, lest they remain too long without the sacrament of love." (Sacramentum Caritatis, Pope Benedict XVI, Paragraph 75) See also paragraphs 34-38, 47.



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On the Reservation and Transportation of the Blessed Sacrament

It is the stated policy of this Archdiocese based upon the directives of the Holy See that the Most Blessed Sacrament may be reserved only in a suitably secured tabernacle at an installation where a Catholic priest celebrates Mass regularly, that is, at least twice a month. This is particularly important for hospitals where a Catholic chapel has been designated and a priest regularly visits and celebrates Mass.

Supervision of the tabernacle key remains the responsibility of the priest. He is to manage the appropriate times that specific EMHCs, authorized by the AMS, may approach the tabernacle in order to bring Holy Communion to the resident patients.

Communion Services are not authorized within the AMS without the explicit and individual permission from this Chancery.

Transportation of the Most Blessed Sacrament by anyone between installations is not authorized.

Catholic Representatives (CR) or Lay Leaders (LL) are authorized to conduct the *Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest*. This will not include the distribution of Holy Communion. CRs and LLs are authorized only at those remote deployed installations where a priest is not permanently assigned and unlikely to visit with any great frequency.

An Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion (EMHC) is authorized to function only at a specific installation at which a priest is permanently assigned and regularly celebrates Mass. An EMHC is not authorized to transport the Blessed Sacrament between installations. Bringing Holy Communion to the hospitalized and homebound on the installation is done in coordination with the priest-chaplain assigned at that installation, and normally is to take place at the conclusion of the Communion Rite of the Mass.

The Most Blessed Sacrament may not be reserved anywhere beyond three (3) weeks after the Mass at which it was consecrated.

All contrary practices are to cease.

This directive supercedes previous edition dated 12 July 2006, same subject.

Rev. Msgr. Ronald A. Newland

Chancellor

10 February 2007