

✉ From the Desk:

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Coronavirus (COVID-19) and the Common Chalices at Mass

It is timely to address the concern over the common chalices filled with the precious blood of Jesus Christ and the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). In numerous dioceses, instructions have been issued ordering the suspension of the common chalices at Mass. This decision requires the balance between a right of the Christian faithful who are properly disposed to reception of Holy Communion under the specific species of the precious blood, on the one hand, and the common good concerning public health and safety, on the other. Some historical context will help us understand this decision.

Up until the Ecumenical Council of Trent, the precious blood was, generally, received in the Latin Church by all the Christian faithful: clergy and laity.¹ In his *Mystagogical Catecheses* St. Cyril of Jerusalem (313 – 386 A.D.) states: “After partaking of the Body of Christ, approach also the chalice of His Blood. Do not stretch out your hands, but, bowing low in a posture of worship and reverence say, ‘Amen,’ sanctify yourself by receiving the Blood of Christ.”² It wasn’t until the twelfth century that, in the West, the communal chalice began to fall out of practice and the priest receive the precious blood alone.³ This is likely due to the ever developing understanding, at this time, of the Doctrine of Concomitance which comes into its full understanding at the Council of Trent (1545-1563).

At the Twenty-first Session of the Council of Trent, July 16, 1562, in the “Doctrine on Communion under both species and of children, chapters 1-3, and at the Twenty-second Session of the Council of Trent, September 17, 1562, in the “Decree on the Request for Granting the Chalice”, the council stated that this decision was to be placed in the Lord’s hands to be decided at a later time but that the laity and non-consecrating clergy attending Mass do not have to receive from the chalice.⁴ However, the common chalice remained a practice even after the Council of Trent. The twenty-first century liturgical scholar Joseph Jungmann brings to our attention that, “after the Council of Trent, the use of the chalice was granted for Germany, under specified conditions, but after some unhappy experiences the concession was withdrawn, for Bavaria in 1571, for Austria in 1584, and for Bohemia and in general, in 1621. This means that

¹See Joseph A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development*, Volume II, trans. by Francis A. Brunner (Notre Dame, Indiana: Christian Classics, 2012) 378-387. See also: Theodor Klauser, *A Short History of the Western Liturgy: An Account and Some Reflections*, trans. by John Halliburton (Oxford, New York, Toronto, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1979) 67-68.

²Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catecheses*, V.22: Leo P. McCauley and Anthony A. Stephenson, trans., *The Works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem*, Vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000) 203.

³See Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, 385. See also: *S. Th.* III, q. 80 a. 12.

⁴Council of Trent, Session 21, July 16, 1562, *Doctrina de communion sub utraque specie et parvolorum*, cap. 1-3: Norman Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* two vols. (Washington, D.C. and London: Sheed and Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990) [hereafter *Tanner*] 2: 726-727; and Council of Trent, Session 22, September 17, 1562, *Decretum super petitione concessionis calicis*: *Tanner* 2: 741.

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for nearly sixty years after the definition of the Doctrine of Concomitance by the Council of Trent and its disciplinary consequences concerning a common chalice at the Twenty-first Session, that the practice did remain in light of the petition for a concession for its use at the Twenty-second Session.

At the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, in its constitution on the sacred liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 55, the council fathers permitted the precious blood to be received by all the Christian faithful. In the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal (GIRM)* promulgated by Pope St. Paul VI we now find the operative law of the Church in regards reception of the precious blood. Number 85 in the *GIRM* lays down the general universal liturgical law permitting the reception of the precious blood, this is further elaborated in numbers 281-287. The right of the Christian faithful to receive the precious blood and the theological significance of this act is here stated: “Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it takes place under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clearer expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the connection between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Kingdom of the Father.”⁵ Thus, there is a right in the law to have this “fuller” participation and the direction by ecclesiastical authorities of this right, such that it is temporarily suspended or restricted, must be very heavily weighed.

Canon 223 §2 states: “Ecclesiastical authorities can, in view of the common good, moderate the exercise of rights which are proper to the Christian faithful.”⁶ The Holy See participates in the European Convention on Human Rights in which Article 9, paragraph 2 states: “Freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.” This shows us that an issue, such as public health is a significant concern and that the ecclesiastical authorities could use the grounds of public health to moderate the rights of the Christian faithful concerning the reception of the precious blood.

Yet, is there such a significant issue of public health due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) in our area that the moderation of the right to receive the precious blood ought to be limited, at this time?

To this question, I respond: In places where the Coronavirus has occurred – absolutely, it is necessary to prevent the further spread of a potentially deadly virus from spreading. In places where the Coronavirus has not yet occurred – the suspension of the chalice occurs only in accord with an overabundance of caution as it may not be necessary to moderate the right of the Christian faithful and suspend the communal chalice at this time. We must be careful that taking such a limiting action could contribute to unnecessary panic which has occurred regarding the

⁵Pope Paul VI, *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, 281.

⁶*CIC*, c. 223 §2: *Ecclesiasticae auctoritati competit, intuitu boni communis, exercitium iurium, quae christifidelibus sunt propria, moderari.*

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Coronavirus and has contributed to the detriment of the common good because it has spurned violence, global economic distress and a fear that undermines faith, hope and love. Where conditions exist that the Coronavirus is a true public health crisis, then the common chalices at Mass ought to be immediately suspended for the sake of public safety and health. Furthermore, all other forms of public life should likewise be examined and appropriately moderated until the general safety of the community can be restored.

Three things must be considered: 1) The Right to Receive the Chalice vs. Real Risk to Public Health, which was discussed above, 2) The Contribution to a General State of Fear that any Limiting Actions May Have, and 3) The Danger of “Agendaists” to seize upon a Crisis to Bring about a Lasting Infringement of Rights.

St. Augustine speaks of fear as ultimately having to be forced-out of our hearts and replaced by love.⁷ Certainly, preventative measures taken concerning a matter of true risk to public health is prudent. And, failure to act prudently concerning such a matter will lead to public distrust and disrepute. The Eucharist is the “Sacrament of Love”. Thus, any moderation of the rights of the Christian faithful must be done and perceived as occurring due to authentic pastoral love and not contribute to fear or be motivated by fear. If the act of moderating a right contributes to fear, then that act is improperly understood and executed. If the act of moderating a right is place and motivated by fear, then it is evil. Thus, not only the mere limitation of any right, but especially one’s right to a “fuller” participation in the Eucharist, the Sacrament of love, ought not be limited easily.

Our third consideration is that of the agendaists. Former Chicago mayor, Rahm Emmanuel, popularized the saying: “Don’t waste a crisis.” This has come to mean that persons with an agenda should seize the opportunity presented by a crisis to further advance their agenda. Whether conservative, liberal or otherwise, the only agenda that should be in the mind of an ecclesiastical authority when addressing the rights of the Christian faithful should be that of the salvation of souls.⁸ In the very beginning of Justinian’s *Digest* we read a quote from the great Roman jurist Ulpian which exhorts us to be artisans of justice:

Celsus’ elegant definition, the law is the art of goodness and fairness. Of that art we [jurists] are deservedly called the priests. For we cultivate the virtue of justice and claim awareness of what is good and fair, discriminating between fair and unfair, distinguishing lawful from unlawful, aiming to make men good not only through fear of penalties but also indeed under allurements of rewards, and affecting a philosophy which, I am not deceived, is genuine, not a sham.⁹

The aim of making men good is not achieved by the seizing upon a crisis for the imposition of an agenda. And, we must be very careful that any limitations placed upon the rights of the Christian faithful during a time where they are moderated for the sake of public health does not bring about lasting deleterious effects by those who seized this “crisis” as an

⁷See St. Augustine, *Homily Nine on the First Epistle of John*.

⁸See *CIC*, c. 1752.

⁹Ulpian, *Institutes*, Bk. 1: D 1.1.1: Alan Watson, ed. and trans., *The Digest of Justinian*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985) 1.

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opportunity to merely progress an agenda. These three concerns need to be weighed judiciously before a decision is made by an ecclesiastical authority.

Lastly, I would like to use this opportunity to remind people who present themselves to receive the Eucharist, in either form, should practice proper hygiene, especially if they are receiving from the common chalice. This would mean that one's hands and mouth are clean: washed and brushed, respectively. And, if one has symptoms of any form of illness, they ought to refrain from receiving from the common chalices and should prudently remain home, make a spiritual act of communion and make use of the dispensations from the Sunday Obligation that many bishops and pastors have offered for the sake of the preservation of public health in one's parish.