



HOLY COMMUNION UNDER BOTH KINDS

The current notation in the GIRM published by the Archdiocese of Portland in 2000 reads: “The revised GIRM (#387) leaves the regulation of distribution of communion under both kinds to the Diocesan Bishop. In the Archdiocese of Portland communion under both kinds is encouraged at every Eucharistic celebration, but most especially at all Masses on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.”

These norms written before the documents of the USCCB on the Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under both kinds in the Dioceses of the United States (2002) and *Redemptionis Sacramentum: On certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist* (2004) have a broad approach to the application of Communion under both kinds.

The dogmatic constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* introduced the possibility of Communion under both kinds with the following: “The dogmatic principles which were laid down by the Council of Trent remaining intact, communion under both kinds may be granted when the bishops think fit, not only to clerics and religious, but also to the laity, in cases to be determined by the Apostolic See, as, for instance, to the newly ordained in the Mass of their sacred ordination, to the newly professed in the Mass of their religious profession, and to the newly baptized in the Mass which follows their baptism.” [55]

The Church Fathers envisioned a somewhat limited application of Communion under both kinds and only then after the doctrinal principles of the Council of Trent had been accepted.

The current General Instruction of the Roman Missal (2011) has a similar approach to the application of Holy Communion under both kinds.

“In addition to those cases given in the ritual books, Communion under both kinds is permitted for

- a. Priests who are not able to celebrate or concelebrate Mass;
- b. The deacon and others who perform some duty at the Mass;



- c. Members of communities at the conventual Mass or “community” Mass, along with seminarians, and all who are engaged in a retreat or are taking part in a spiritual or pastoral gathering.

The diocesan Bishop may establish norms for Communion under both kinds for his own diocese, which are also to be observed in churches of religious and at celebrations with small groups. The diocesan Bishop is also given the faculty to permit Communion under both kinds whenever it may seem appropriate to the priest to whom, as its own shepherd, a community has been entrusted, provided that the faithful have been well instructed and there is no danger of profanation of the Sacrament or of the rites becoming difficult because of the large number of participants or some other reason.” [283]

In the addendum to the current GIRM (2011) for the United States the Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under both kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America state:

“In practice, the need to avoid obscuring the role of the Priest and the Deacon as the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion by an excessive use of extraordinary ministers might in some circumstances constitute a reason either for limiting the distribution of Holy Communion under both species or for using intinction instead of distributing the Precious Blood from the chalice.” (24)

The 2004 Vatican document *Redemptionis Sacramentum*: On certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist states: “So that the fullness of the sign may be made more clearly evident to the faithful in the course of the Eucharistic banquet, lay members of Christ’s faithful, too, are admitted to Communion under both kinds, in the cases set forth in the liturgical books, preceded and continually accompanied by proper catechesis regarding the dogmatic principles on this matter laid down by the Ecumenical Council of Trent. In order for Holy Communion under both kinds to be administered to the lay members of Christ’s faithful, due consideration should be given to the circumstances, as judged first of all by the diocesan Bishop. It is to be completely excluded where even a small danger exists of the sacred species being profaned. [100-101]



Redemptionis Sacramentum continues: “The chalice should not be ministered to lay members of Christ’s faithful where there is such a large number of communicants that it is difficult to gauge the amount of wine for the Eucharist and there is a danger that more than a reasonable quantity of the Blood of Christ remain to be consumed at the end of the celebration. The same is true wherever access to the chalice would be difficult to arrange. [102]

With regard to Sacred Vessels *Redemptionis Sacramentum* states: “Reprobated, therefore, is any practice of using for the celebration of Mass common vessels, or others lacking in quality, or devoid of all artistic merit or which are mere containers, as also other vessels made from glass, earthenware, clay, or other materials that break easily. This norm is to be applied even as regards metals and other materials that easily rust or deteriorate.” [117]

Given the obligation of the Diocesan Bishop to establish appropriate regulations in this regard and in light of the above observations, the new Liturgical Norms for the Archdiocese (June 2018) will state that Communion under both kinds should not be administered outside of a church building, e.g. school gymnasium, nursing homes; or when there is a large congregation; or where the configuration of the church is such that a reverent and orderly distribution cannot be achieved without the risk of spillage or profanation. The church’s directives regarding the type of Sacred Vessels will be strictly applied. If sufficient appropriate Sacred Vessels cannot be provided then Communion under both kinds should not be offered.

It is permissible and in some cases even opportune to start implementing these policies before promulgation.

In some communities there will be a need for catechesis regarding the Church’s teaching regarding the Holy Eucharist and the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds. Attached is a document (June 2011) from the Office for the Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff that may be helpful, it is entitled: “Doctrinal Formation and Communion under Both Kinds”. It may serve as a starting point for priests, deacons, catechists and theology teachers in parishes and schools.



OFFICE FOR THE LITURGICAL CELEBRATIONS OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF

Doctrinal Formation and Communion under Both Kinds

In the ordinary form of the Mass, the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds is an option whose usage has become a daily occurrence in many countries but, by no means everywhere, even in Europe.

The instruction “*Redemptionis Sacramentum*”, promulgated in 2004, explains the context of this practice: “So that the fullness of the sign may be made more clearly evident to the faithful in the course of the Eucharistic banquet, lay members of Christ’s faithful, too, are admitted to Communion under both kinds, in the cases set forth in the liturgical books, preceded and continually accompanied by proper catechesis regarding the dogmatic principles on this matter laid down by the Ecumenical Council of Trent” (100).

This laudable intention frequently meets the catechetical stumbling block mentioned. Undoubtedly, Holy Communion under both species illustrates Christ’s intention that we eat his Body and drink his Blood. However, that desire for Holy Communion in both kinds has not necessarily been accompanied by fidelity to the norms of liturgical books and supporting formation to protect against Eucharistic abuses and doctrinal misunderstandings.

While many have grasped that the Eucharist is the “Source and Summit” of Christian life, the handing down of the dogmatic principles of the Council of Trent has been seen as old-fashioned. The instruction has made clear that, intrinsic to the “fullness of the sign,” is consistency with liturgical books and with the teachings of Trent.

“*Redemptionis Sacramentum*” displaces ambiguities of Eucharistic practice and “is directed toward such a conformity of our own understanding with that of Christ, as expressed in the words and the rites of the Liturgy” (5). Not infrequently, essential lack of Eucharistic awareness is revealed when, for want of formation,



commissioned extraordinary ministers make reference to “giving out the wine.” This very terminology suggests that, as part of their proper training, the dogmatic principle of Trent was not absorbed. Some might have heard about “substance” and “accidents” within the contexts of the religious education of yesteryear, but might have been encouraged to think that the Church had, somehow, moved on.

For modern generations, the Council of Trent may not have been mentioned in their doctrinal formation which emphasizes that “nothing is lost by the body being received by the people without the blood: because the priest both offers and receives the blood in the name of all, and the whole Christ is present under either species” (*Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 80, a. 12, ad 3). So, under the species of bread there is also present, by concomitance, the precious blood.

The purpose, then, of receiving Holy Communion under both kinds, is not that the faithful receive more grace than when they receive it under one kind alone, but that the faithful are enabled to appreciate vividly the value of the sign. Sadly, this distinction has not always been made clear and some people, when not offered Holy Communion under both kinds, have expressed a sense of bewilderment, even thwarted entitlement, or a feeling that Holy Communion under one kind alone was, to some extent, deficient.

Bishops conferences and diocesan bishops, in particular, are the key to ensuring locally that Holy Communion is distributed with reverence and avoidance of misunderstanding. “*Redemptionis Sacramentum*” makes clear that the slightest danger of the sacred species being profaned is to be avoided (101). It also expresses concern about the “detriment of so great a mystery” (106). While “profanation” and the “detriment of so great a mystery” suggest different levels of Eucharistic abuse, both levels are expressly mentioned so that they will be avoided.

Every care should be taken to avoid the ministering of the chalice where circumstances suggest ambiguity of reception or a setting where the safety of the contents of the chalice might not be assured. “*Redemptionis Sacramentum*” states that where it is difficult to assess the quantity of wine needed for a particular celebration, owing to the large size of the congregation expected that the chalice is not to be ministered (102).



Alternative methods could be equally difficult to envisage such as the use of a spoon or a tube where these options are not the local custom. For Holy Communion by intinction, “the communicant must not be permitted to intinct the host himself in the chalice, nor to receive the intincted host in the hand” (104).

Forthcoming translations of the third edition of the Roman Missal mark, as the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales wrote in their joint pastoral letter of May 2011, “a moment of special grace.” It is to be hoped that the envisaged in-depth catechesis on the Mass will revisit the mentality and the manner in which Holy Communion is received.

It sounds restrictive to suggest that Holy Communion received fervently under one species is more fruitful than a tepid Communion received under both species when concrete objectives aimed at doctrinal formation, care and reverence in the liturgical celebration and organizational forethought could do so much to acknowledge and address the challenges that have arisen.

The psalmist declares the imperative of that in-depth catechesis: “The things we have heard and understood, the things our fathers have told us these we will not hide from their children but will tell to the next generation” (Psalm 78:4).

St. Ambrose discloses what people of faith gain from that knowledge: “For as often as we eat this Bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the death of the Lord. If we proclaim the Lord’s death, we proclaim the forgiveness of sins. If, as often as his Blood is poured out, it is poured for the forgiveness of sins, I should always receive it, so that it may always forgive my sins. Because I always sin, I should always have a remedy” (St Ambrose, *De sacr.* 4, 6, 28: PL 16, 464).

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