

Norms for the Public Celebration of Devotions in the Diocese of Stockton

1. The devotional life of the Christian faithful is an essential part of the spirituality of each member of the body of Christ. While “the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed [and] at the same time . . . the font from which all her power flows” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10), the liturgy does not exhaust the Church’s life, nor especially her sanctifying office. “Popular devotions of the Christian people are to be highly commended, provided they accord with the laws and norms of the Church, above all when they are ordered by the Apostolic See” (*SC*, 13).

As important as devotions are for the personal spirituality of the faithful, they must be understood and promoted in their proper relationship to the liturgy.

Devotions should be so drawn up that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some fashion derived from it, and lead the people to it, since, in fact, the liturgy by its very nature far surpasses any of them (*SC*, 13).

As the ecclesial action of the Church united to Christ her Head, the liturgy makes present the one, eternal sacrifice of the Lord. Popular devotions lead the faithful to a more fruitful celebration of the liturgy, at the same time that the liturgical celebration spurs them on to greater piety and holiness.

2. In his apostolic exhortation on Marian devotion *Marialis cultus*, Pope Paul VI outlined several characteristics of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary that apply equally to all popular devotions. First, true devotions are Trinitarian in nature, praying to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. Second, they are rooted in the mystery of the Word made flesh, Jesus the Lord. Third, while devotions do not possess the preeminence of the liturgy, they do nevertheless help the faithful to exercise their baptismal priesthood through pious exercises, an activity always done in and through one’s membership in the body of Christ, the Church.

THE LITURGY AND DEVOTIONS

3. Even though the liturgy far surpasses any popular devotion, the dynamic relationship between the liturgy and devotions cannot be understated. On the one hand, some understand the liturgical reforms of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* to diminish the need for and importance of popular devotions. This thinking contradicts the strong commendation of devotions by the conciliar fathers. On the other hand, one cannot mix the liturgy and devotions to form some hybrid rite, as when pious exercises are inserted into the Eucharistic celebration. “This creates the danger that the Lord’s Memorial Rite, instead of being the culmination of the meeting of the Christian community, becomes the occasion, as it were, for devotional practices” (*Marialis cultus*, 31).

THE LITURGICAL YEAR AND DEVOTIONS

4. The entire cycle of the Christian Mystery is set forth in the liturgical year. Through the seasons of the temporal cycle, “the Church celebrates the whole mystery of Christ, from his incarnation until the day of Pentecost and the expectation of his coming again” (*General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar*, 17). Popular devotions must, in their own way, promote the unfolding of the Christian Mystery for the faithful. Thus, they can never diminish—or far less, contravene—the seasonal liturgical celebration of the Paschal Mystery.

The Easter Triduum and Easter Season hold first place among the seasons of the liturgical year. This “culmination of the entire liturgical year” gives Easter “the same kind of preeminence in the liturgical year that Sunday has in the week” (*GNLYC*, 18). For this reason, any communal celebration of popular devotions must give way to the celebration of the liturgy on these most important days.

GENERAL NORMS

5. The following General Norms are promulgated as particular law for the Diocese of Stockton to ensure a proper balance between the celebration of the liturgy and the public celebration of devotions.

- a. Public celebrations of devotions are permitted in churches, with the consent of the pastor, and in oratories, with the consent of the superior.
- b. Public celebrations of novenas are not permitted in churches, oratories, or parish facilities during the Easter Triduum.
- c. On the Sundays of Easter, communal celebrations of the Sacrament of Penance are not permitted. Likewise, it is not in keeping with the joy of the Lord’s resurrection to schedule any celebrations of the Sacrament of Penance on the Sundays of Easter
- d. Devotional practices cannot replace or curtail liturgical celebrations, e.g., replacing the Funeral Vigil with the Rosary, or eliminating the reception of the body at the door of the church because the Rosary immediately precedes the Funeral Mass.
- e. Only the competent ecclesiastical authority can approve liturgical texts. Therefore, devotional prayers are not to be added to the liturgy.
- f. When the faithful gather to celebrate devotions publicly, lay persons are encouraged to exercise their baptismal priesthood in roles as the presider, reader, cantor, et al.

As diocesan bishop, I hereby decree that these norms will take effect on 19 March 2002, the solemnity of St. Joseph, as particular law for the Diocese of Stockton.

+ Stephen E. Blaire
Bishop of Stockton

Barbara Thiella, SND de Namur
Chancellor

Given at the Chancery
of the Diocese of Stockton
on this 6th day of March, 2002.