

6. My Sacrifice and Yours

Communion from the Altar of Sacrifice

Fr. Steve Walter

Have you ever thought about the words the priest says prior to the Eucharistic Prayer when he says, “Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Father almighty?” We all participate in the sacrifice of the Mass, and yet, one of the most misunderstood directives of the liturgy is the norm that the faithful should receive Holy Communion from the sacrifice of the Mass being celebrated. All too often, the priest or deacon goes to the tabernacle to get already consecrated Hosts to use for Holy Communion along with those just consecrated at Mass. Receiving Holy Communion from the Table of the Lord is strongly encouraged, yet rarely practiced.

In 1963, the Church encouraged us, in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* of the Second Vatican Council, with the following words.

That more complete form of participation in the Mass whereby the faithful, after the priest’s communion, receive the Lord’s body from the same sacrifice, is strongly commended.⁵⁸

This was not an innovation or a new insight. Pope Pius XII, in his Encyclical *Mediator Dei* (1947) invites this same examination of liturgical practice and encourages that the faithful receive Holy Communion consecrated at the Mass in which they are participating. Citing his predecessor, Benedict XIV (1740-1758) he says:

They also participate in the same Sacrifice to whom a priest distributes the Blessed Sacrament that has been reserved; however the Church has not for this reason ever forbidden, nor does she now forbid, a celebrant to satisfy the piety and just request of those who when present at Mass want to become partakers of the same sacrifice, because they likewise offer it after their own manner, nay more, she approves of it and desires that it should not be omitted....⁵⁹

Now it is very fitting, as the liturgy otherwise lays down, that the people receive holy communion after the priest has partaken of the divine repast upon the altar; and, as we have written above, they should be commended who, when present at Mass, receive hosts consecrated at the same Mass, so that it is actually verified, “that as many of us, as, at this altar, shall partake of and receive the most holy body and blood of thy Son, may be filled with every heavenly blessing and grace.”⁶⁰

We find similar encouragement again in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*:

Above all, the Second Vatican Council, which recommended “that more perfect form of participation in the Mass by which the faithful, after the Priest’s Communion, receive the Lord’s Body from the same sacrifice,” called for another desire of the Fathers of Trent to be put into effect, namely, that for the sake of a fuller participation in the Holy Eucharist “at each Mass the faithful present should communicate not only by spiritual desire but also by sacramental reception of the Eucharist.”⁶¹

It is most desirable that the faithful, just as the Priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord’s body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass, and that, in the cases where this is foreseen, they partake of the chalice (cf # 283) so that even by means of the signs Communion may stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated.⁶²

Additional references cited in other documents can be found at the end of this article.

As we strive to implement these directives more seriously, perhaps it would be good for us to consider the reason for this encouragement. One reason, clearly stated, is that it places the reception of Holy Communion in the context of the appreciation of the Mass as a sacrifice.

To say that the Mass is a sacrifice reminds us of the context out of which it was born. On the night before he died Jesus desired to eat the Paschal Meal with his disciples. The annual celebration of the Passover was at the heart of Jewish life. Participation in this sacrificial meal was and is a renewal of the covenant between God and his people. A lamb was secured by a family, taken first to the temple to be slaughtered, and then taken home to be prepared and eaten in a ritual meal. The eating of the meal was an essential part of the ritual and completed it. The eating of the paschal lamb (and the unleavened bread) signified the acceptance of the covenant relationship with God by Israel and fidelity to the practice of the faith. It placed the participant within the context of a covenant relationship with God and a way of life in fidelity to that covenant.

The Church has always seen a clear connection between the Passover Covenant and Jesus Christ, the Paschal Lamb, sacrificed for our salvation. One has only to look at the context of the Mass and the reception of Holy Communion to see this appreciation and connection. As the bread is broken and apportioned out for distribution we sing a litany to Christ, the Lamb of God. And in inviting the liturgical assembly to the altar, the priest says, "Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb."

We are first claimed by Christ and welcomed into this holy people, this people of the new covenant in his blood, through the waters of baptism. Our weekly celebration of the Sunday Eucharist invites us again and again to renew this covenant. The Eucharist is the one repeatable sacrament of initiation. By our participation in the Eucharist we grow in and embrace that faith we first encountered in the waters of baptism. Fed and nourished by his Body and Blood, we are drawn more and more into the Mystery of the Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ – the paschal Mystery.

This title, the Lamb of God, first given to Jesus by his cousin, John the Baptist, and developed in the New Testament is both ancient and important. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God, and we who partake of his body and blood in the context of the Sacrifice of the Mass renew the covenant made by Christ. He has redeemed us. He has saved us from sin and death. He has given us a share in his own divine life, both here and in eternity.

It seems that for a variety of reasons the Church in pastoral practice has not been as attentive to this aspect of the mystery of the Eucharist. But it is important that we have/develop a sense of participating in "this Sacrifice," "this Mass." Every aspect of the structure of the celebration draws us deeper into the mystery of Christ. The variety of texts that make up the celebration: the entrance hymn/chant, the sign of the cross, the Collect, the scripture texts proclaimed and sung in the Liturgy of the Word, the Universal Prayer, the Eucharistic Prayer, all of them draw us more deeply into the mystery of the covenant. Many of these texts change from day to day and liturgical season to season. Each time we celebrate the Eucharist we are drawn to new insight and appreciation of what it means to embrace the life, death and resurrection of Christ. We come to recognize that saving pattern in the rhythm of our own daily life. As we have the opportunity to be broken and poured out for others as Christ was for us, our participation in the Eucharist help us to recognize and name this rhythm of dying and rising in our own life. It is in the context of the Mass in which we are participating that we say our "yes" to the covenant as we renew it on a given day.

In summary, the practice of retrieving Hosts during the Lamb of God is not foreseen in the rubrics of the *Roman Missal*. Nowhere does it say, "and now, the priest or deacon goes to the tabernacle to get Hosts consecrated at another Mass." Rather, the expectation is for the people to receive the Body and Blood of Christ consecrated at the Mass being celebrated.

It is important that we develop among the faithful a deeper appreciation of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. When preaching on the Holy Eucharist, or when preparing catechesis, it will be important to invite the faithful to a deeper appreciation of this.

Following are some ways that a parish might consider making a change in practice so that the faithful may participate fully in the Sacrifice of the Mass.

Some practical suggestions:

1. Count the number of people at your parish Sunday and daily Mass schedule, take the average and prepare accordingly. In doing this for several months, a clear pattern should be noticeable.
2. If you run out, then go to the tabernacle and get some of the reserved hosts. The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion who runs out may go to the tabernacle and do this.
3. At the end of the communion procession, just as the EMsHC consume the remaining precious blood; they could also consume the remaining consecrated hosts. This way, the reserved Eucharist in the tabernacle could be kept in reserve without becoming out of proportion. Of course, enough Hosts should be kept to administer Holy Communion to the sick, those in the hospital and the home bound.
4. If the hosts reserved in the tabernacle accumulate and need to be used, this could happen on an ad hoc basis as needed, and become the exception rather than the norm.

Additional Documentation

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

55. That more perfect form of participation in the Mass whereby the faithful, after the priest's communion, receive the Lord's body from the same sacrifice, is strongly commended.

General Instruction of the Roman Missal

85. It is most desirable that the faithful, just as the Priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord's Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and that, in the cases where this is foreseen, they partake of the chalice (cf. no. 283), so that even by means of the signs Communion may stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated.

Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds

30. When Holy Communion is to be distributed under both species, careful planning should be undertaken so that: ...enough bread and wine are made ready for the communication of the faithful at each Mass.⁴⁵ As a general rule, Holy Communion is given from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and not from those reserved in the tabernacle.

Redemptionis sacramentum

88. The faithful should normally receive sacramental Communion of the Eucharist during Mass itself, at the moment laid down by the rite of celebration, that is to say, just after the Priest celebrant's Communion. [172] It is the Priest celebrant's responsibility to minister Communion, perhaps assisted by other Priests or Deacons; and he should not resume the Mass until after the Communion of the faithful is concluded. Only when there is a necessity may extraordinary ministers assist the Priest celebrant in accordance with the norm of law. [173]

89. “So that even by means of the signs Communion may stand out more clearly as a participation in the Sacrifice being celebrated”, [174] it is preferable that the faithful be able to receive hosts consecrated in the same Mass. [175]

[172] SC, 55.

[173] Cf. S. Congregation of Rites, Instruction, *Eucharisticum mysterium*, n. 31: AAS 59 (1967) p. 558; Pontifical Commission for the Authentic Interpretation of the Code of Canon Law, Response to dubium, 1 June 1988: AAS 80 (1988) p. 1373.

[174] *Missale Romanum*, Institutio Generalis, n. 85.

[175] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 55; S. Congregation of Rites, Instruction, *Eucharisticum mysterium*, n. 31: AAS 59 (1967) p. 558; *Missale Romanum*, Institutio Generalis, nn. 85, 157, 243.

December 2006 BCL Newsletter

Five Questions on the Distribution of Holy Communion from the Tabernacle Reprinted from the December 2006 Bishop’s Committee on the Liturgy Newsletter.

1. ***Should Holy Communion be regularly distributed from the tabernacle?*** No. *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM)* makes clear that “it is most desirable that the faithful, just as the priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord’s Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and that, in the instances when it is permitted, they partake of the chalice,¹ so that even by means of the signs Communion will stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated.”²
2. ***How is the participation of the faithful more clearly expressed by the reception of hosts consecrated at the same Mass?*** This participation is manifested in the two great processions of the faithful at Mass.³ In the presentation of the gifts first, the faithful present the bread and wine for the sacrifice along with the gift of their very lives. The very same bread and wine which they have offered is then consecrated by the action of the priest and returned to them as the Body and Blood of their Lord when they come forward in procession to receive Holy Communion.
3. ***What is the primary purpose of reserving consecrated hosts in the tabernacle?*** Consecrated hosts are reserved in the tabernacle for the administration of viaticum, the communion of the sick and adoration of the Most Holy Eucharist outside Mass.⁴
4. ***What are the roots of the preference for the distribution of hosts consecrated at the same Mass?*** In 1742, Pope Benedict XIV urging the promotion of frequent reception of Holy Communion, highlights the reception of Holy Communion consecrated at the same Mass when “one and the same sacrifice is shared” by the priest and the faithful.⁵ This teaching was echoed by Pope Pius XII in his 1947 encyclical on the liturgy, commending those who “when present at Mass, receive hosts consecrated at the same Mass, so that it is actually verified, ‘that as many of us, as, at this altar, shall partake of and receive the most holy Body and Blood of thy Son, may be filled with every heavenly blessing and grace’ (Encyclical letter *Mediator Dei*, no. 121). The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council thus taught: “that more complete form of participation in the Mass by which the faithful, after the priest’s communion, receive the Lord’s Body from the sacrifice, is strongly endorsed.”⁶

5. *How can this goal be practically achieved?* Pastors who have implemented this provision advise that the first step is the acceptance of the ideal of enabling the faithful to receive hosts consecrated in the same Mass.⁷ The training of sacristans, ushers, greeters and other ministers in determining the approximate size of the congregation has also been helpful in this regard.⁸

¹ Cf. GIRM, no. 283; *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America*.

² GIRM, no. 85; cf. *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, nos. 31, 32, and *Immensae caritatis*, pp. 267-268.

³ Cf. GIRM, no. 44.

⁴ Cf. *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass (HCWEOM)*, no. 7, *Eucharisticum Mysterium* #49.

⁵ *Certiores effecti*, no. 7.

⁶ *Sacrosanctum concilium*, no. 55.

⁷ Cf. *Redemptionis sacramentum*, no. 89.

⁸ Cf. HCWEOM, no. 7.

