



ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE

Reintroduction of the Distribution of the Precious Blood

April 6, 2023

Dear Friends,

Given the easing of restrictions associated with the COVID-19 public health emergency, the distribution of the Precious Blood *may* be reintroduced into parish Masses at the *pastor's discretion* beginning on the **Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ** (June 10-11, 2023). In the meantime, the Precious Blood may be given to those who are being baptized, received into the full Communion of Catholic Church, or completing their Christian initiation at the Easter Vigil or during the Easter season, including on Pentecost.

Bishop Lucia invites us to take this opportunity to reflect on the spiritual meaning of this sacred action established by the Lord Himself, to offer Eucharistic catechesis to members of the faithful, and to refine parish liturgical practices in accordance with ecclesial norms.

The USCCB's *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America* state that the Precious Blood has been distributed to the faithful since the earliest days of Christianity in fulfillment of Christ's command to "take and eat... [and] take and drink" (no. 6). This ancient practice was generally discontinued during the scholastic era after the turn of the first millennium, due, in part, to concerns over spillage of the Precious Blood. However, recognizing the importance of the effective use of signs within the celebration of the liturgy, and reflecting on the institution of the Eucharist within the context of a sacred meal, the Second Vatican Council called for the reintroduction of the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds in 1963's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium*.

The current *General Instruction of the Roman Missal [GIRM]* offers a fine summary of the theology which undergirds this practice:

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 (no. 281).

Thus, the distribution of the Precious Blood underscores the nature of the Eucharist as spiritual food and drink given to sustain and build up the pilgrim Church on earth. This action also points to the eternal banquet of heaven, where all God's people will "come from east and west, and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God" (Lk 13:29).

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* continues:

The diocesan bishop also has the faculty to allow Communion under both kinds, whenever it seems appropriate to the Priest to whom charge of a given community has been entrusted as [its] own pastor, provided that the faithful have been well instructed and there is no danger of the profanation of the Sacrament or that the rite would be difficult to carry out on account of the number of participants or for some other reason (no. 283).

Here, the *GIRM* notes that it is necessary to provide proper catechesis to a parish community prior to introducing (or reintroducing) the distribution of the Precious Blood at Mass. Amongst the various matters to be presented, the USCCB's *Norms* recommend giving special attention to the following:

- the ecclesial nature of the Eucharist as the means by which all the faithful are gathered into one Body in Christ;
- the Eucharist as the memorial of Christ's sacrifice, his death and resurrection, and as the sacred banquet;
- the Real Presence of Christ in the eucharistic elements, whole and entire—in each element of consecrated bread and wine (the doctrine of concomitance);
- the kinds of reverence to be shown to the Eucharist, both during and outside of Mass; and
- the distinction between the roles of Ordinary and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.

Parishes that will reintroduce the practice of distributing the Precious Blood in the coming months will also want to be especially attentive to the following practical considerations and liturgical norms:

- In distributing the Precious Blood, a sufficient number of chalices should be prepared prior to Mass. Wine may be poured into these vessels from a common flagon, but this should occur during the Presentation of the Gifts, and never following the consecration in the Eucharistic Prayer.
- It is not necessary to place a small drop of water into each chalice, but only the principal chalice used by the priest-celebrant.
- When approaching the chalice, the communicant should bow as a sign of reverence and respond “Amen” to the words offered by the minister, “The Blood of Christ.” After the communicant has received the Precious Blood, the chalice should be wiped with a purificator and turned before presenting it to the next communicant.
- It always remains the choice of the communicant, not the minister, to receive from the chalice.

- While the preferred manner of distributing the Precious Blood is via the chalice, this may also take place through intinction in the (arch)dioceses of the United States. When distributing the Precious Blood in this manner, the priest should place the host in a chalice held by the deacon before saying to the communicant, “The Body and Blood of Christ.” Alternatively, it is possible to use a special set of vessels designed for intinction when there is not a deacon present, whereby a small chalice is placed in the center of a larger ciborium of hosts.
- It is not permitted for communicants to intinct the host themselves and then self-communicate, as this would detract from the sign value of being fed by the Lord in Holy Communion.
- The USCCB has indicated that the “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” (*Norms*, 24). As well, the Holy See has stated that “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... or where a notable part of the people continues to prefer not to approach the chalice for various reasons, so that the sign of unity would in some sense be negated” (*Redemptionis Sacramentum*, no. 102).
- Additional information and instructions on proper practice for distributing the Precious Blood may be found on the [USCCB website](#).
- Diocesan guidelines and instructions for “The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion at Mass” may be found on the [diocesan website](#) under “Eucharist.” This resource should be used when training (or re-training) extraordinary ministers.

The reintroduction of this practice in our diocesan parishes serves as an opportunity to reflect on the great gift of the Eucharist, the Real Presence of Christ Himself, to the People of God. Especially in this time of national Eucharistic revival, a renewed appreciation of, and devotion to Jesus, who makes Himself available to us in Holy Communion at every Mass, is a reminder to all of the love of Christ and His desire to remain with His People always.

(Source: Adapted from the Archdiocese of New York, Office of Liturgy, *Liturgy Update*, Vol 10.2-March 2023)

Thank you for your kind attention to this important matter. As always, please let me know if you have any questions.

In Christ,



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