

With the publication of the Instruction [Redemptionis Sacramentum](#), *On Certain Matters to be Observed or to be Avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist*, pastors may be looking for assistance in responding to various questions.

The following are notes to help in the reflections of pastors and faithful. These have been prepared by the French Sector National Liturgy Office of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, in consultation with the English Sector National Liturgy Office.

When applying the Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, it will be pertinent to recall the following:

1. The Instruction is to be read in continuity with the 17 April 2003 Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II, [Ecclesia de Eucharistia](#).
2. The Instruction is accompanied by a presentation from the Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, His Eminence Francis Cardinal Arinze.
3. The implementation of the Instruction is entrusted to the bishop of the diocese who is the moderator, promoter, and custodian of the whole liturgical life of his diocese (cf. can. 835).
4. As recalled by the Second Vatican Council in its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 26, "Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church, which is the 'sacrament of unity', namely, a holy people united and organized under their bishops. Therefore, liturgical services pertain to the whole body of the Church...."

NOTES

These notes have been prepared by the French Sector National Liturgy Office of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, in consultation with the English Sector National Liturgy Office, on the Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, approved on 25 March 2004 and issued 23 April 2004 by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

1. Nature of the document

This is an instruction from a Roman Congregation, approved in ordinary form by the Supreme Pontiff. It resembles an act of administrative rather than legislative law. The subtitle clearly indicates its disciplinary nature: "On certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist".

The Instruction does not seek to provide a catechesis or a theology of the Eucharist. The vocabulary used is distinctly disciplinary; for example, the term "norm(s)" appears 67 times whereas the term "formation" appears only three times. The first chapter, "The Regulation of the Sacred Liturgy", presents a summary of the major principles of liturgical law. The eighth and final chapter, "Remedies", deals with applicable procedures and sanctions in cases of liturgical abuses. The reader is directed to other documents (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Dies Domini* and *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*) for a reflection on theological or catechetical aspects.

2. Objective

The objective is clearly indicated in paragraph 2: the Instruction treats "of certain matters pertaining to the discipline of the Sacrament of the Eucharist" but is not "a compendium of norms" regarding the sacrament. At the same time, it also establishes further norms "by which those earlier ones are explained and complemented". In this regard, the Instruction is intended to serve as a reminder of pre-existing norms and to clarify their implications.

It is evident that the Congregation seeks to counter and to correct a certain number of abuses, as well as to encourage full respect for liturgical norms. "All should conform to the ordinances set forth by legitimate ecclesiastical authority" (n. 7). Different types of abuses are dealt with more explicitly near the end of the document. The first of these to be presented are the most serious offences that violate the sanctity of the sacrament of the Eucharist and are to be

referred to the Congregation, which is the only authority competent to deal with the *graviora delicta* (n. 172). As for other types of abuses, there are certain serious matters that risk the validity and dignity of the sacrament (n. 173). Other abuses are characterized by the violation of norms found in liturgical books; these abuses are also to be avoided and corrected (n. 174-175). Numerous abusive practices are listed in each chapter, and the questions dealt with are evident by surveying the table of contents.

3. Intended audience

In principle, the Instruction is aimed at the entire Latin Church and, within it, all categories of the faithful. *Redemptionis Sacramentum* makes specific mention of the important roles of the diocesan Bishop, “the first steward of the mysteries of God in the particular Church entrusted to him” (n. 19); of priests, the “capable, prudent and indispensable co-workers of the order of Bishops, called to the service of the People of God” (n. 29); and of lay ministers, who “for the good of the community and of the whole Church of God ... have rightly and laudably exercised ministries in the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy” (n. 43).

The Instruction also makes particular note of the following:

Bishops: are reminded that by virtue of their mission as moderators, promoters and guardians of the whole liturgical life of their diocese (n. 19), they must investigate an abuse of the sacrament of the Eucharist whenever they receive plausible notice (n. 178);

Priests: as “capable, prudent and indispensable co-workers of the order of Bishops” (n. 30), are to cultivate “their liturgical knowledge and ability” (n. 33);

Deacons: are also to do their part to celebrate the liturgy according to the norms of the duly approved liturgical books (n. 35);

Lay faithful: are reminded of their right “to a liturgical celebration that is an expression of the Church’s life in accordance with her tradition and discipline” (n. 11);

All the faithful: have a right to bring a complaint regarding liturgical abuse to the attention of the local Bishop or Apostolic See (n. 184), but at the same time the document suggests starting with the diocesan Bishop.

4. Helpful principles

The Instruction deals with diverse questions of varying importance. Occasionally, the text recalls legislative or liturgical principles that will be useful in evaluating particular situations. Some of these principles are the following:

- The Bishop is to assure liberty for adapting celebrations in an intelligent manner to a particular Church building, or for the faithful present, or in accordance with particular pastoral circumstances (n. 21);
 - Priests are to cultivate their liturgical knowledge and ability (n. 33);
 - Active participation in the liturgy is to be promoted and explained, with ample flexibility for adaptations and appropriate creativity in accordance with the needs of the participants (n. 39);

- There should customarily be true and suitable sacred music; altar, vestments and sacred linens are to be dignified, proper, and clean (n. 57);
 - The celebration of the Eucharist is to be carefully prepared in all its parts (n. 58);
 - The homily is to be based upon the mysteries of salvation, expounding the mysteries of the faith and the norms of Christian life from the biblical readings and liturgical texts (n. 67);

- External gifts added to the offerings of bread and wine must always be a visible expression of that true gift which God expects (a contrite heart, the love of God and neighbour) and should be brought forward in an appropriate manner (n. 70);
 - The sign of peace is appropriate before Holy Communion (nn. 71-72);
 - The penitential act, at the beginning of Mass, has the purpose of preparing all to be ready to celebrate the sacred mysteries, and cannot be regarded as a substitute for the Sacrament of Penance (n. 80);
 - The First Communion of children must always be preceded by sacramental confession and absolution (n. 87);
 - The celebrant priest is not to resume the Mass until the Communion of the faithful is concluded (n. 88);
 - It is preferable that the faithful, as also the priests (n. 98), receive Communion with hosts consecrated at the same Mass (n. 89);
 - The fullness of the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident when Communion is under both kinds (n. 100);
 - Masses are not to be multiplied contrary to the norm of law (n. 116);

- The sacred vessels may be purified at the credence table (n. 119);
- Pastors are to take care that the linens for the sacred table, especially those which will receive the sacred species, are always kept clean (n. 120);
- The sacred vestments should contribute to the beauty of the sacred action itself (n. 121);

- The Eucharist is to be reserved in a tabernacle in a part of the church which is noble, prominent, readily visible, and adorned in a dignified manner and furthermore suitable for prayer (n. 130);
 - Unless there is a grave reason to the contrary, a church in which the Eucharist is reserved should be open to the faithful for at least some hours each day (n. 135);
 - The Eucharist, when exposed, is not to be left unattended, even for the briefest space of time (n. 138);
 - The priests present at the celebration are not to abstain from distributing Communion by handing this function to laypersons (n. 157);
 - In the case of particular celebrations in the absence of a priest, the diocesan Bishop must prudently discern whether Holy Communion ought to be distributed, and it is preferable that such gatherings be directed by several lay faithful rather than by only one member of the laity (n. 165);
 - In the case of weekday celebrations in the absence of a priest, there should be concern about distributing Holy Communion outside of Sunday Mass (n. 166);
 - The remedy for abuses is the biblical and liturgical formation of all the People of God (n. 170).

5. Abuses indicated

All the abuses indicated in the Instruction are not equally serious, and so it is also important to evaluate their gravity. In addition to those most serious cases which involve sacrilege, the simulation of the Mass, or concelebration with ministers of Ecclesial Communities that do not have Apostolic Succession, other abuses include:

- The use of Eucharistic Bread that is not unleavened or made purely of wheat (n. 48);
- The use of wine other than that which is natural and from the fruit of the grape, pure and incorrupt (n. 50);
- The use or composition of unauthorized Eucharistic Prayers (n. 51);
- Allowing parts of the Eucharistic Prayer to be recited by a deacon, a lay minister, or an individual member of the faithful, or by all members of the faithful together (n. 52);
- The use of other music during the Eucharistic Prayer, apart from the duly approved acclamations (n. 53);
- The breaking of the host at the time of the consecration (n. 55);
- The omission of the name of the Supreme Pontiff or of the diocesan Bishop in the Eucharistic Prayer (n. 56);

- Altering or varying the texts of the liturgy (n. 59);
- Separating the Liturgy of the Word from the Liturgy of the Eucharist by celebrating them at different times or places (n. 60);
- Omitting or substituting the prescribed biblical readings, including the responsorial psalm, or substituting with non-biblical texts (n. 62);
- The proclaiming of the Gospel by a layperson, even a religious (n. 63);
- Entrusting the homily to a layperson (nn. 64-65), seminarians, theological students, or “pastoral assistants” (n. 66);
- The introduction of Creeds or Professions of Faith not in the duly approved liturgical books (n. 69);
- Giving an instruction or testimony at Mass on the Christian life by a layperson before the Prayer after Communion, or confusing this instruction or testimony with the homily, or dispensing the homily on account of the instruction or testimony given by a layperson (n. 74);

- The insertion of the celebration of Mass into the setting of a common meal (n. 77);
- Introducing into the Eucharistic celebration elements that are contrary to the prescriptions of the liturgical books or taken from the rites of other religions (n. 79);
- The faithful taking by themselves the sacred host or the sacred chalice, or handing these from one to another, and the administration of Communion by one spouse to another at the Nuptial Mass (n. 94);
- The distribution of unconsecrated hosts or other edible or inedible things after the manner of Communion (n. 96);
- The priest celebrant or a concelebrant waiting until after the Communion of the faithful before taking Communion himself (n. 97);
- The pouring of the Blood of Christ after the consecration from one vessel to another, which is completely to be avoided (n. 106);
- Celebrating the Mass in a temple or other sacred place of any non-Christian religion (n. 109);
- The suspension of Mass in an arbitrary manner on the pretext of promoting a “fast from the Eucharist” (n. 115);
- The celebration of the Eucharist with common vessels, or others lacking in quality, or devoid of all artistic merit or which are mere containers (n. 117);
- The celebration of Mass by a priest without sacred vestments, even when only one minister is participating (n. 126);
- The participation of priests at Mass in the manner of the lay faithful, except in rare and exceptional cases and with reasonable cause (n. 128).