

THE SACRED CONGREGATION OF THE HOLY OFFICE

Instructions On Discipline To Be Observed In Eucharistic Fast

The Apostolic Constitution "Christus Dominus," issued today by the Sovereign Pontiff Pius XII happily reigning, grants several faculties and dispensations with respect to the observance of the law of the Eucharistic fast. It also confirms, in great measure and substantially, the rules of the Code of Canon Law (can. 808 and 858, s.1) for the priests and the faithful able to observe that law of the Eucharistic fast.

Nevertheless, the favorable first order of this Constitution, according to which natural water (that is, without the addition of any element) no longer breaks the Eucharistic fast (Const., Rule 1), is extended to these people also.

But, with regard to the other concessions, these can be used only by priests and by the faithful who find themselves in the conditions described in the Constitution, or by those who say evening Masses or receive Holy Communion at such Masses authorized by the Ordinaries within the limits of the new faculties granted to them.

And so, in order that the rules with regard to such concessions may be observed uniformly everywhere, in order to avoid any interpretation which would make these faculties appear more extensive than they really are, and in order to prevent every abuse in this matter, the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, at the direction and by the command of the Sovereign Pontiff himself, has issued the following:

With regard to the sick, either the priests or the faithful: (Rule II of the Constitution):

1) The faithful who are sick, though not confined to bed, may take something in the form of beverage, though not an alcoholic beverage, if, by reason of their sickness they cannot, without real inconvenience, observe a complete fast up to the time they receive Holy Communion.

They can also take something in the form of medicine, either liquid (but not alcoholic) or solid, as long as what they take is real medicine, prescribed by a physician or commonly esteemed as such. It must be noted that any solid taken as nourishment cannot be considered as medicine.

2) The conditions under which a person may be able to take advantage of this dispensation from the law of fasting, for which no time limit preceding Holy Communion is prescribed must be judged very prudently by the confessor. Without his advice no one can use this dispensation.

The confessor, however, can give his advice either when he is hearing confessions or privately apart from the confessional. He may also give this advice once so that the person to whom he gives it may always act upon it as long as the conditions of this same sickness last.

3) Sick priests, even though not confined to their beds, may use the dispensation if they are going to say Mass or receive the Holy Eucharist.

With regard to priests placed in special circumstances: (Constitution, rules III and IV):

a) Priests who are not sick, but who are going to say Mass at a late hour (that is, after nine o'clock), b) after operating work of the sacred ministry (for example, from early in the morning or for a long time), or c) after a long journey (that is, at least about two kilometers walking or a proportionately longer trip in terms of the classes of vehicles used, the difficulties of the journey, and the condition of the person), may take something in the form of drink, but not any alcoholic beverage.

5) The three cases indicated above are such as to take in all the circumstances in which the legislator intends to grant the above-mentioned faculty. Consequently every interpretation which would make these faculties seem more extensive must be avoided.

6) Priests who are in such circumstances can take something in the form of drink once or many times, but they must keep the fast for one hour before they say Mass.

7) Moreover all priests who are going to say Mass twice or three times the same day can, in the earlier Masses, consume the two abstinions prescribed by the rubrics of the Missal, but using only the water which, according to the new principle, does not break the fast.

The priest who says three Masses, one after the other, on Christmas or on All Souls Day is bound to follow the rubrics with regard to the abstinions.

8) If it should happen that a priest who is obliged to say Mass two or three times the same day should inadvertently consume wine in the abstinence, he is not prevented from saying the second and the third Mass.

With regard to the faithful in special circumstances: (Constitution, Rule V)

9) Likewise the faithful who are unable to keep the Eucharistic fast, not by reason of sickness, but because of some serious difficulty, can take something in the form of drink. They cannot,

Caruso Memorial



Diamonds and emeralds from the cufflinks of the late Italian tenor, Enrico Caruso, form a part of the ornamentation of this gold chalice presented to Georgetown University, Washington. It is a gift of William C. Martens of Bronxville, N. Y. It will be used in Dahlgren Chapel on the campus. The gift is in memory of a 1914 classmate, William H. Prendergast. (NC Photos).

beverage (but no alcoholic beverage) at all, up until one hour before Mass or Communion.

10) The cases wherein there is such a serious difficulty (grave incommodum) are these three. It is wrong to add any others.

a) Work that weakens, started before Holy Communion. Such is the function of laborers in factories, transport and dock workers, or workers in other public utilities employed in day and night shifts; or those who, by reason of duty or of charity, must stay awake during the night (for example, nurses, night watchmen, etc.); and of pregnant women and mothers of families who must spend a long time before their household duties before they can go to Church, etc.

b) The late hour at which Holy Communion is received. There are many of the faithful who can have a priest to say Mass among them only at a late hour. There are likewise many children for whom it would be too difficult, before going to school, to go to the Church, receive Holy Communion, and then to go back home to eat breakfast.

c) A long journey which must be made in order to reach the Church. As has been explained above (in 4), a trip is to be considered long for this purpose if it covers a walk of about a mile and a quarter, or a journey that is longer in proportion to the vehicles used, the difficulty of the journey itself, or the condition of the person making the journey.

11) The nature of such serious difficulty must be judged prudently by the confessor, either while he is hearing confessions or in a private conversation with the one seeking advice. The faithful cannot receive the Holy Eucharist not fasting without the confessor's advice. The confessor can give his advice once and for all, to be effective as long as the nature of the serious difficulty remains.

With Reference to Evening Masses: (Constitution, Rule VI)

By the force of the Constitution the Ordinaries of places (cf. can. 1262) have the faculty of permitting the saying of evening Masses in their own territory, should circumstances render this necessary. This holds true despite the command of canon 821, §1.

The common good sometimes demands the saying of Mass at midday; for example, for the workers in some industries who work their shifts on feast days, for those categories of workers who must be on the job during the morning hours of feast days, like dock workers, and likewise for those who have come in great numbers and from considerable distances for some religious or social celebration, etc.

12) Such Masses, however, may not be said before four o'clock in the afternoon, and may be celebrated only on the following definitely stated days. These are:

a) Holydays of obligation according to the rule of canon 1247, §1;

b) Feasts which were formerly holidays of obligation but which now are not. These are listed in the Index published by the Sacred Congregation of the Council on Dec. 28, 1919 (AAS, XII, 1920, 42 f.);

c) First Fridays of the month;

d) Other solemn occasions which are celebrated with great gatherings of the people.

On one day of the week other than those enumerated above, if the good of special classes of persons should demand it.

13) Priests who say afternoon Masses, as well as the faithful who receive Holy Communion at these Masses, may, at the meal which is permitted up to three hours before the beginning of Mass or Communion, take with due moderation the alcoholic beverages which are ordinarily taken at meals (for example, wine, beer, and the like). They may not take strong liquors. Before or after this meal they may take something in the form of

His Holiness Pope Pius XII Apostolic Constitution Concerning Discipline Of Eucharistic Fast

Christ the Lord "on the night in which He was betrayed" (1 Cor., 11:23) when for the last time He kept the Pasch of the old law, after He had supped (cf. Luke, 22:20) gave bread to His disciples, saying: "This is My Body which shall be given up for you" (1 Cor., 11:24); and He likewise presented the chalice to them saying: "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is being shed for many" (Matt., 26:28). "Do this in remembrance of me" (cf. 1 Cor. 11:24 f.).

From these passages out of Holy Scripture it is completely obvious that our Divine Redeemer wished to substitute, in place of this final Passover ceremony in which a lamb was eaten according to the rite of the Hebrews, a new Pasch which would endure until the end of the world, that is, the eating of the Immaculate Lamb who was to be immolated for the life of the world. Thus the new Pasch of the new law put an end to the old Passover and the truth emerged from the shadow (cf. the Hymn "Lauda Sion" in the Roman Missal).

But since the conjoining of the two suppers was so arranged as to signify the transfer from the old Pasch to the new, it is easy to see why the Church, in renewing the Eucharistic Sacrifice at the command of the Divine Redeemer and in commemoration of Him, could depart from the custom of the ancient low-feast and introduce the Eucharistic fast.

From the very earliest times the authority of the sacred canons and the praiseworthy and approved custom of the Church have observed and do observe the following: that Mass should not be said after the celebrant has taken food, nor should Holy Communion be received by the faithful without fasting, unless in case of illness or of some other necessity conceded or admitted by right or by the Church" (Conc. Constant. sess. XII: Mansi, XXVII, 727).

It has pleased Us to recall these things so that all may understand that We, despite the fact that new conditions of the times and of affairs have moved Us to grant not a few faculties and favors on this subject, still wish through this Apostolic Letter to confirm the supreme force of the law and custom dealing with the Eucharistic fast; and that We wish also to admonish those who are able to observe that same law that they should continue diligently to observe it, so that only those who need these concessions can enjoy them according to the nature of their need.

Increased Devotion We are most effectively consoled, and it is right to speak of this love, even though briefly, when we see that devotion to the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar is increasing day by day, not only in the souls of the faithful, but also in what has to do with the splendor of the divine worship, which has often been made evident in public popular demonstrations.

The careful directions of Sovereign Pontiffs have doubtless contributed a great deal to this effect, and especially that of the Blessed Pius X who, summoning all to renew the primitive custom of the Church, urged them to receive the Bread of Angels very frequently, even daily, if possible (Sacra Tridentina Synodus: Dec. 20, 1905: Acta S. Sedis, XXXVIII, 400 ff.).

Inviting the little ones to this heavenly food, he wisely decreed: that the precept of holy Confession and Holy Communion has reference to every one of those who have reached the use of reason (S. Congr. de Sac. Decretum "Quam singulari" Aug. 8, 1910: AAS, II, 57 ff.). This same rule is prescribed in the Code of Canon Law (CIC can. 863; cf. can. 854, SS 5).

The faithful responding generously and willingly to these directions of the Sovereign Pontiffs, have approached the sacred Table, more hungry for the heavenly Bread and the thirst for the Sacred Blood burn in all men-of every age and of every walk of life!

Modern Conditions It should nevertheless be noted that the times in which we live and their peculiar conditions have brought many modifications in the habits of society and in the activities of common life. Out of these there may arise serious difficulties which could keep men from partaking of the divine mysteries if the law of the Eucharistic fast is to be observed in the way in which it had to be observed up to the present time.

In the first place, it is evident to all that today the clergy are not sufficiently numerous to cope with the increasingly serious needs of the faithful. Especially on feast days they are subject to overwork, when they have to offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice at a late hour and frequently twice or three times the same day, and when at times they are forced to travel a great distance so as not to leave considerable portions of their flocks without Holy Mass.

Such being apostolic work undoubtedly weakens the health of priests. This is all the more true because, over and above the offering of the Holy Mass and the explanation of the Gospel, they must likewise hear confessions, give

catechetical instruction, devote ever-increasing care and take ever more pains in completing the duties of the other parts of their ministry.

They must also diligently look after those matters that are demanded by the warfare against God and His Church, a warfare that has grown so widespread and bitter at the present time.

Now our mind and heart go out to those especially who, working far from their own native country in far distant lands, have generously answered the invitation and the command of the Lord: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations." (Matt. 28, 19).

We are speaking of the heralds of the Gospel who, overcoming the most difficult and multitudinous labors and all manner of difficulty in traveling, strive with all their might to have the light of the Christian religion illumine all, and to nourish their flocks, who but very recently received the Catholic faith, with the Bread of Angels which nourishes virtue and fosters piety.

Almost in the same situation are those Catholics who, living in many localities cared for by Catholic missionaries, or who, living in other places and not having among them their own priests, must wait until a late hour for the coming of another priest, to whom they may partake of the Eucharist and nourish themselves with the divine food.



'Calls All To Table Of The Angels'

wards the Eucharist may be all the more readily increased, many Bishops from various countries have asked, in official letters, that the law of fast be somewhat mitigated. Actually, the Apostolic See has kindly granted special faculties and permissions, in this regard, to both priests and faithful.

As regards these concessions, We can cite the Decree, entitled, Post Edictum, given for the sick by the Sacred Congregation of the Council, December 7, 1906 (Acta S. Sedis, XXXIX, p. 603 ff.); and the Letter of the 22nd of May, 1923, from the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office of the local Ordinaries in favor of priests (S. Congregatio S. Officii Littere Locorum Ordinarius datae super iulio eucharistica ante Missam: AAS, XV, p. 151 ff.).

In recent days, the petitions of the Bishops have become more frequent and urgent, and the faculties granted were more ample, especially those that were bestowed in view of the war. This, without doubt, clearly indicates that there are new and grave reasons, that are not occasional but rather general, because of which it is very difficult, in these diversified circumstances, both for the priest to celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice, and for the faithful to receive the Bread of Angels, observing the traditional fasting legislation.

Wherefore, in order to meet these grave inconveniences and difficulties and to provide, on the different induits may not lead to inconsistent practice. We have deemed it necessary to lay down the discipline of the Eucharistic fast. By mitigating it in such a way that, as far as possible, all may be able to fulfill this law more easily.

We trust that We may be able to add considerably to the increase of Eucharistic piety, and in this way to encourage all to partake at the Table of the Angels. This, without doubt, will increase the glory of God and the holiness of the Mystical Body of Christ.

New Rules By Our Apostolic authority We decree and command all the following:

Rule I. The law of the Eucharistic fast from midnight continues in force for all of those who do not come under the special conditions which We are going to set forth in this Apostolic Letter. In the future it shall be a general and common principle for all, both priests and faithful, that natural water does not break the Eucharistic fast.

Rule II. The sick, even when they are not confined to bed, can, on the prudent advice of a confessor, take something in the form of beverage or of true medicine. This does not hold for alcoholic beverages. The same faculty is given to sick priests who are going to say Mass.

(Note: In reference to Rule II ("with regard to the sick"), the Holy Office gives the following explanation: "1) The faithful who are sick, even though not confined to bed, may take something in the form of beverage, though not an alcoholic beverage, if, by reason of their sickness they cannot, without real inconvenience, observe a complete fast up to the time they receive Holy Communion. They can also take something in the form of medicine, either liquid (but not alcoholic), or solid, as long as what they take is real medicine, prescribed by a physician or commonly esteemed as such. It must be noted that any solid taken as nourishment cannot be considered as medicine."

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beverage (but no alcoholic beverage) at all, up until one hour before Mass or Communion.

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