

The Communion Rite in Liturgical Reform

Last of a Series
By FR. CLIFFORD HOWELL S.J.

The historical background of Holy Communion explains much of the reason for reform of this ritual. Father Howell is an expert in liturgy.

One reform that the Council has introduced into the communion rite is of tremendous importance. That is communion under both kinds, alias "the confession of the chalice to the laity." It was authorized only for specific occasions under certain conditions; but the reasonable and entirely necessary restrictions surrounding the concession do not in any way detract from the importance of the reform that lies in its underlying principle rather than in the details of its practice.

This can hardly be appreciated except against a background of history. At the Last Supper our Lord said,

"Take, eat, take, drink . . ." and for about 12 centuries His invitation was obeyed to the letter throughout the entire Church, both East and West, whenever the Eucharist was celebrated. Communion at Mass was always communion under both kinds, not only for the clergy, but also for the laity.

Not until the 8th century were any objections raised against giving the chalice to the laity, and they were due to the growth of reverential awe which was itself a reaction to Arrianism. The clergy began to worry about the possibility of irreverence through the spilling of the

Precious Blood. In the East they invented the spoon, and in the West the fistulae (tube or reed) so that the faithful need not actually handle the chalice. The use of the spoon involved dipping a particle of the bread into the wine—that is intinction. The practice of intinction began to spread into the West.

Rome's first official reaction was that of protest. These things (spoons and fistulae) were not "drinking"; they were a departure from what our Lord had done when instituting the Eucharist; they were not biblical; they were contrary to all traditions of Eucharistic celebration. Again and again intinction was forbidden; but the prohibition was not everywhere observed because intinction was so very convenient. Condemnation of it, however, succeeded one another at intervals right up until the 12th century.

But then came a change. By this time popular piety had become centered exclusively on the Real Presence; both the sacrificial and meal aspects of the Mass were much neglected and the faithful were being nourished on a diet of mere allegorism.

Theologians, largely preoccupied with refuting Berengarius, had established the doctrine of "concomitance." If Christ was present whole and entire under either species, why go to all the bother and trouble of giving both to the laity? Here and there priests began to give communion under the species of bread only; and since, by that time, communion was lam-

ently infrequent and viewed solely as "the visit of Christ to the soul," the omission of the chalice met with little or no opposition.

In the 15th century heresies caused further troubles. The Hussites and other enemies of the Church seized on "the missing chalice" as a grievance, and made communion under both kinds the very symbol of their movement. They condemned communion under one kind as "sacrilegious and illicit," as unscriptural, as flagrant disobedience to Christ's command in John 6:53: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

When the Lutheran reformation broke out, the same cry was heard, but now in the form of the assertion that the laity, by being deprived of the chalice, were being deprived of grace.

The Council of Trent had to pronounce on this by condemning the proposition and affirming that no grace essential to salvation was lost by those who received communion under one kind only.

But the Council Fathers were divided about whether the chalice should now be forbidden absolutely or still remain ad libitum. But even in these, the desire for communion under both kinds died out because "two kinds" had become a sort of confessional symbol of the Reformation. Catholics did not like to receive under two kinds even when allowed; so in due course the concession was withdrawn.



And thus there arose the astounding situation that the Church was forbidding what she had always held to be the ideal just because her enemies persisted in misrepresenting into that ideal theological implications that were erroneous! Given the circumstances of those days she could hardly do anything else!

Practical difficulties remain when numbers are large; a general restoration of the chalice at all Masses is, and probably ever will be, out of the question. But even limited restoration is of great value. It is good for the faithful at large to be aware that the chalice is not an exclusively clerical privilege, even if they personally do not happen to be among those qualifying for it on particular occasions.

Beyond doubt, drinking from the chalice is quite the best from the criterion of authenticity of symbol. It fulfills to the letter what our

Lord said, and is the complete sign of the biblical meal, expressing its biblical and theological values to the full. Hygienic objections seem ill-founded: has anybody ever adduced a single instance of any disease being passed on by drinking from the same chalice as someone else?

Provided the layman actually takes the chalice into his hands so as to control its tilting for himself (instead of having it tilted for him by the priest) the danger of spilling the Precious Blood is minimal. So, whenever it is both permitted and possible, the laity should be allowed to drink from the chalice.

This is practicable, however, only for small numbers. If there are many communicants there are such difficulties about estimating, providing and distributing the right quantity of wine that the task becomes impossible.

Sister Mary Walter, DC., recently appointed religious superior and assistant administrator, will be introduced. A hospital tour also is slated.

Mrs. John F. Ryan heads the tea committee, assisted by Mrs. William J. Meyer Jr. and Mrs. J. Warren Urlaub.

Hostesses will include the following Seton executives of fixers: the Mesdames Joseph W. McHugh, Joseph R. Vasile, William T. Brunson, Frederick J. Sarkis, Jerome Lysault, Francis P. Marino, Robert E. Parker, Theodore J. MacDonald, Joseph H. Bayer.

Pouring will be the Mesdames Erwin J. Boerschlein, Joseph Deane, Robert J. Kurtz, James Lang, Raymond LeChase, etc.

Mr. and Mrs. Kasper of Webster will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary Sunday with a Mass at St. Rita's and a family party at home. They have lived at 570 Webster Road all their married life.

Mr. and Mrs. Kasper have one daughter, one granddaughter and one great-granddaughter.

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