

New Vatican Directives on Liturgy

(NC News Service)

The Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship has issued an instruction on parish liturgy.

Key portions of the new document follow:

This work of renewal has been carried out, step by step, during the past six years . . . Now it can be said that a new and promising future lies ahead for pastor-liturgical action.

The wide choice of texts and the flexibility of the rubrics make it possible to adapt the celebration to the circumstances, the mentality and the preparation of the assembly.

Thus there is no need to resort to arbitrary adaptations, which would only weaken the impact of the liturgy . . .

There were those who, for the sake of conserving ancient tradition, were unwilling to accept these reforms. There were others who, concerned with urgent pastoral needs, felt they could not wait for the definitive renewal to be promulgated.

As a result, some individuals, acting on private initiative, arrived at hasty and sometimes unwise solutions, and made changes, additions or simplifications in the rites which at times went against the basic principles of the liturgy.

This only troubled the conscience of the faithful and impeded or made more difficult the progress of genuine renewal . . .

It is the scope of this document to aid and encourage the bishops in putting fully into effect the liturgical norms, especially those contained in the general instruction of the Roman Missal. In order to restore the orderly and serene celebration of the Eucharist, the center of the Church's life as "a sign of unity, a bond of charity," the following guidelines should be followed:

Liturgical reform is not at all synonymous with so-called desecralization and is not intended as an occasion for what is called secularization. Thus the liturgy must keep a dignified and sacred character.

The effectiveness of liturgical actions does not consist in the continual search for newer rites or simpler forms, but in an ever deeper insight into the word of God and the mystery which is celebrated.

The priest will assure the presence of God and his mystery in the celebration by following the rites of the Church rather than his own preferences.

The priest should keep in mind that, by imposing his own personal restoration of sacred rites, he is offending the rights of the faithful and is introducing individualism and idiosyncrasy into celebrations which belong to the whole Church . . .

Full importance must be given to the liturgy of the word in the Mass. Other readings, whether from sacred or profane authors of past or present, may never be substituted for the Word of God, nor may only a single Scripture lesson be read.

The purpose of the homily is to explain the readings and make them relevant for the present day. This is the task of the priest, and the faithful should not add comments or

engage in dialogue during the homily.

The liturgy of the word prepares the assembly and leads them to the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus the two parts of the Mass form one act of worship and may not be celebrated separately, at different times or in different places . . .

The liturgical texts composed by the Church also deserve great respect. No one may make changes, substitutions, additions or deletions in them.

This rule applies especially to the *Ordo Missae*. The formulas which it contains, in the official translations, may never be altered, not even when Mass is sung. However, some parts of the rite such as the penitential rite, the eucharistic prayer, the acclamations of the people, the final blessing, can be chosen from various alternative formulas, as indicated for each rite . . .

The Church does not exclude any kind of sacred music from the liturgy. However, not every type of music, song or instrument is equally capable of stimulating prayer or expressing the mystery of Christ.

Music in the celebration must serve the worship of God, and thus must have qualities of holiness and good form, be suited to the liturgical action and the nature of each of its parts, not impede the active participation of the whole assembly, but must direct the attention of mind and heart to the mystery which is celebrated.

It is the duty of the bishops' conferences to lay down guidelines for liturgical music, or, in the absence of general norms, the local bishops may make these for their diocese. Attention should be given to the choice of musical instruments: these should be few in number, suited to the place and the community, should favor prayer and not be too loud . . .

During the celebration of the Mass, the priest may say a few words to the people: at the beginning, before the readings, the preface, the prayer after communion, and before the dismissal. But he should abstain from adding comments during the eucharistic prayer. These words should be brief and to the point, and should be prepared beforehand.

If other comments or announcements need to be made, these should be made by the lay leader of the assembly, but he should avoid all exaggeration and limit himself to what is necessary . . .

The eucharistic prayer is the prayer of the priest; of all the parts of the Mass, it is that which belongs especially to him alone, because of his office. Thus it is not permitted to have some part of it read by a minister or lower rank, by the assembly or by a lay person. Thus the priest alone must say the whole eucharistic prayer.

The bread used for the celebration of the Eucharist is wheat bread, and, according to the ancient custom of the Latin Church, is unleavened.

The truth of the sign demands that this bread look like real food which is broken and shared among brothers. However, it must always be made in the traditional form, according to the general instruction of the Missal; this applies both to the individual hosts for the communion of the faithful and to larger altar breads which are



Two contemporary masters, (above) Dali and (below) Scheibe, interpret the two recurring themes of the sacred liturgy of the Church: eating at banquet of the Lord and calling to mind His sacrifice to the Father for our sins.



broken up into smaller parts for distribution . . .

Communion under both kinds is the more perfect sacramental expression of the people's participation in the Eucharist. The cases in which this may be done are enumerated in the general instruction of the Roman Missal.

Ordinaries, within the limits established by the bishops' conference, should not give general permission but should clearly state the cases and celebrations in which it is given. They should avoid occasions when there are large numbers of communicants. The groups should be limited in number, well ordered and homogeneous.

The faithful should be given special instruction, so that when they receive communion under both kinds, they can fully understand its meaning.

A priest, deacon or ordained acolyte should be present to offer the chalice to the communicants . . .

It is best to avoid the practice of passing the chalice from one communicant to another or of having the communicant take the chalice directly from the altar. In these cases communion should be administered by intinction.

The office of administering communion belongs first to priests, then to deacons and, in

some cases, to acolytes. Those who have not been appointed must not distribute communion or carry the Blessed Sacrament . . .

The traditional liturgical norms of the Church prohibit women (young girls, married women, religious) from serving the priest at the altar, even in chapels of women's homes, convents, schools and institutes.

However, norms have been published according to which women may:

Proclaim the Scripture readings, except the Gospel.

Say the prayers of the faithful;

Play the organ and other instruments which may be used in church; lead the singing of the assembly;

Make announcements and give explanatory comments to aid the people's understanding of the rite.

Common or household articles may not be used in the liturgy. Chalices and patens should be consecrated by the bishop before they are used; he will judge whether or not they are suitable for the liturgy.

The practice of wearing only a stole over the monastic cowl or ordinary clerical garb for concelebration is reproved as an abuse.

It is never permitted to celebrate Mass or perform other sacred actions, such as the laying on of the hands at ordinations or the administering of other sacraments or blessings, while wearing only the stole over street clothes.

The Ordinary, within his own jurisdiction, will decide when there is a real necessity which permits celebrating outside the Church. In such a case, careful attention should be given to the choice of a place and a table which are fitting for the eucharistic sacrifice. As far as possible, dining halls and tables on which meals are eaten should not be used for the celebration . . .

When liturgical experimentation is seen to be necessary or useful, permission is granted in writing by this sacred congregation alone; the experiments will be made according to clearly defined norms, under the responsibility of the competent local authority . . .

Finally, it must be remembered that the liturgical renewal is a concern of the whole Church. This renewal should be studied in both its theoretical and its practical aspects as an instrument for the Christian formation of the people, so that the liturgy may become for them a living and meaningful experience.

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