

Lord's

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Sacramentorum.

Instruction on facilitating

ADS 3764

Sacred Congregation for the Discipline
of the Sacraments

INSTRUCTION ON FACILITATING
SACRAMENTAL COMMUNION IN PARTICULAR
CIRCUMSTANCES

January 29, 1973

Immensae Caritatis

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Christ the Lord has left to the Church, his Spouse, a testament of his immense love. This wonderful gift of the Eucharist, which is the greatest gift of all, demands that such an important mystery should be increasingly better known and its saving power more fully shared. With the intention of fostering devotion to the Eucharist—the summit and center of Christian worship—the church, moved by pastoral zeal and concern, has on more than one occasion issued suitable laws and appropriate documents.

Present-day conditions however demand that, while the utmost reverence owing to such a Sacrament (1) is constantly maintained, greater access to Holy Communion should be made possible so that the faithful, by sharing more fully in the fruits of the sacrifice of the Mass, might dedicate themselves more readily and effectively to God and to the good of the Church and of mankind.

First of all, provision must be made lest reception become impossible or difficult owing to a lack of a sufficient number of ministers. Provision must also be made lest the sick be deprived of such a great spiritual consolation by being impeded from receiving Holy Communion because of the law of fast, which they may not be able to observe, even though it be already very moderate. Finally, it seems appropriate to determine in which circumstances the faithful who ask to receive sacramental Communion a second time on the same day may be permitted fittingly to do so.

After a study of the recommendations of certain episcopal conferences the following norms are issued in regard to:

1. extraordinary ministers for the distribution of Holy Communion;
2. a more extensive faculty of receiving Holy Communion twice in the same day;

3. mitigation of the Eucharistic fast for the sick and elderly;
4. the piety and reverence owing to the Blessed Sacrament whenever the Eucharist is placed in the hand of the communicant.

I

Extraordinary Ministers for the Distribution of Holy Communion

There are various circumstances in which a lack of sufficient ministers for the distribution of Holy Communion can occur:

- during Mass, because of the size of the congregation or a particular difficulty in which a celebrant finds himself;
- outside of Mass, when it is difficult because of distance to take the sacred species, especially the Viaticum, to the sick in danger of death, or when the very number of the sick, especially in hospitals and similar institutions, requires many ministers. Therefore, in order that the faithful, who are in the state of grace and who with an upright and pious disposition, wish to share in the Sacred Banquet, may not be deprived of this sacramental help and consolation, it has seemed appropriate to the Holy Father to establish extraordinary ministers, who may give Holy Communion to themselves and to other faithful under the following determined conditions:

I. Local Ordinaries have the faculty to permit a suitable person individually chosen as an extraordinary minister for a specific occasion or for a time or, in the case of necessity, in some permanent way, either to give the Eucharist to himself or to other faithful and to take it to the sick who are confined to their homes. This faculty may be used whenever

- a. there is no priest, deacon or acolyte;
- b. these are prevented from administering Holy Communion because of another pastoral ministry or because of ill health or advanced age;
- c. the number of faithful requesting Holy Communion is such that the celebration of Mass or the distribution of the Eucharist outside of Mass would be unduly prolonged.

II. Local Ordinaries also have the faculty to permit individual priests exercising their sacred office to appoint a suitable person who in cases of genuine necessity would distribute Holy Communion for a specific occasion.

III. The above-mentioned Local Ordinaries can delegate these faculties to auxiliary bishops, episcopal vicars and episcopal delegates.

IV. The suitable person to whom numbers I and II refer shall be designated according to the following order: lector, student of major seminary, male religious, woman religious, catechist, Catholic man

or woman. This order however can be changed according to the prudent judgment of the local Ordinary.

V. In oratories of religious communities of either sex the office of distributing Holy Communion in the circumstances described in number I can fittingly be given to a male superior not having major orders or to a woman superior or to their respective vicars.

VI. If time permits, it is fitting that the suitable person individually chosen by the Local Ordinary for administering Holy Communion, as well as the person appointed by a priest having the faculty spoken of in number II, should receive the mandate according to the rite annexed to this Instruction; they are to distribute Holy Communion according to the liturgical norms.

Since these faculties are granted only for the spiritual good of the faithful and for cases of genuine necessity, priests are to remember that they are not thereby excused from the task of distributing the Eucharist to the faithful who legitimately request it, and especially from taking and giving it to the sick.

The person who has been appointed to be an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion is necessarily to be duly instructed and should distinguish himself by his Christian life, faith and morals. Let him strive to be worthy of this great office; let him cultivate devotion to the Holy Eucharist and show himself as an example to the other faithful by his piety and reverence for this most holy Sacrament of the altar. Let no one be chosen whose selection may cause scandal among the faithful.

II

The Extended Faculty for Receiving Holy Communion Twice in the Same Day

According to the discipline currently in force, the faithful are permitted to receive Holy Communion a second time:

- on the evening of Saturday or of the day preceding a holy-day of obligation, when they intend to fulfil the precept of hearing Mass, even though they have already received Holy Communion in the morning of that same day: (2)
- at the second Mass of Easter and at one of the Masses celebrated on Christmas Day, even if they have already received Holy Communion at the Mass of the Paschal Vigil or at the midnight Mass of Christmas: (3)
- likewise at the evening Mass of Holy Thursday, even if they have received Holy Communion at the earlier Mass of the Chrism. (4)

Since, beyond these circumstances which have been mentioned, there are similar occasions which suggest that Holy Communion

might fittingly be received twice in the same day, it is necessary here to determine more precisely the reasons for the new faculty.

The norm which the Church, a most provident Mother, has introduced according to venerable custom and included in canon law by which the faithful are permitted to receive Holy Communion only once a day remains intact nor is it permitted to be set aside merely from motives of devotion. To a simple desire for repeated reception of Holy Communion it should be answered that the power of the Sacrament by which faith, charity and the other virtues are nourished, strengthened and expressed is all the greater to the extent that one more devoutly approaches the sacred table. (5) For, from the liturgical celebration the faithful should go out to the works of charity, piety and apostolic action so that "they may hold fast by their conduct and life to what they have received by faith and the Sacrament." (6)

Special circumstances however can occur when the faithful who have already received Holy Communion that same day, or even priests who have already celebrated Mass, may be present at some community celebration. They may receive Holy Communion again in the following instances:

1. at those Masses in which the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Anointing of the Sick, Sacred Orders and Matrimony are administered; also at a Mass at which First Communion is received; (7)
2. at Masses at which a church or altar is consecrated; at Masses of religious profession or for the conferring of a "canonical mission";
3. at the following Masses of the Dead: the funeral Mass, the Mass celebrated after notification of death, the Mass on the day of final burial and the Mass on the first anniversary;
4. at the principal Mass celebrated in the cathedral or in the parish on the feast of Corpus Christi and on the day of a parochial visitation; at the Mass celebrated by the major superior of a religious community on the occasion of a canonical visitation, or special meetings or chapters;
5. at the principal Mass of a Eucharistic or Marian Congress, whether international or national, regional or diocesan;
6. at the principal Mass of any congress, sacred pilgrimage or preaching mission for the people;
7. in the administration of Viaticum, in which Communion can also be given to the relatives and friends of the patient;
8. Also local Ordinaries may, besides those cases mentioned above, grant permission "ad actum" to receive Holy Communion twice in the same day, as often as they shall judge it truly justified by reason of genuinely special circumstances, according to the norm of this Instruction.

III

Mitigation of the Eucharistic Fast for the Sick and the Aged

Above all it remains firmly decreed that a person to whom Viaticum is administered in danger of death is not bound by any law of fasting. (8) Likewise remaining in force is the concession already granted by Pius XII whereby "the sick, even if not confined to bed, can take non-alcoholic drinks and medicines in either liquid or solid form before the celebration of Mass and the reception of the Eucharist without any restriction of time. (9)

In the case of foods and drinks taken for the purpose of nutrition that tradition is to be respected according to which the Eucharist should be received, as Tertullian said, "before any food" (10) so as to indicate the excellence of the sacramental food.

In order to appreciate the dignity of the Sacrament and to prepare with joy for the coming of the Lord, a time of silence and recollection before the reception of Holy Communion is opportune. In the case of the sick, however, it will be a sufficient sign of piety and reverence if, for a brief period of time, they turn their minds to the greatness of the mystery. The period of time of the Eucharistic fast or abstinence from food and alcoholic drink is reduced to approximately one quarter of an hour, for the following:

1. the sick in hospitals or in their own homes, even if they are not confined to bed;
2. the faithful advanced in age who must remain at home because of age or who are living in a home for the aged;
3. sick priests, even if not confined to bed, and elderly priests, who wish to celebrate Mass or receive Holy Communion;
4. persons looking after the sick and the aged as well as those relatives of the sick and aged wishing to receive Holy Communion with them, whenever they are unable to observe the fast of one hour without inconvenience.

IV

Piety and Reverence Towards the Blessed Sacrament When the Eucharist is Placed in the Hands of the Faithful

Since the Instruction *Memoriale Domini* was published three years ago, some episcopal conferences have sought the faculty from the Apostolic See to allow the minister of Holy Communion to place the Eucharistic species in the hands of the faithful. As that Instruction recalled, "the precepts of the Church and the documents of the Fathers amply testify that the deepest reverence and the greatest prudence have been shown with regard to the Holy Eucharist," (11) and should continue to be shown. Especially in this manner of receiving Holy Communion some points indicated by experience should be most carefully observed.

Let the greatest diligence and care be taken particularly with regard to fragments which perhaps break off the hosts. This applies to the minister and to the recipient whenever the Sacred Host is placed in the hands of the communicant.

Before initiating the practice of giving Holy Communion in the hand a suitable instruction and catechesis of Catholic doctrine is necessary concerning both the real and permanent presence of Christ under the Eucharistic species and the reverence due to this Sacrament. (12) It is necessary to instruct the faithful that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Saviour and that the same worship and adoration given to God is owed to him present under the sacramental signs. Let the faithful be counselled therefore not to omit a sincere and fitting thanksgiving after the Eucharistic banquet, such as may accord with each one's particular ability, state and duties. (13) So that participation in this heavenly table may be altogether worthy and profitable, the value and effects deriving from it for both the individual and the community must be pointed out to the faithful in such a way that their familiar attitude reveals reverence, fosters that intimate love for the Father of the household who gives us "our daily bread" (14) and leads to a living relationship with Christ of whose flesh and blood we partake. (15)

The Supreme Pontiff Paul VI has approved and sanctioned this Instruction by his authority, and directed that it should be published, decreeing that it should enter into force on the day of its publication.

Given in Rome, at the Sacred Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments, 29 January 1973.

A. Card. Samore, Prefect

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NOTES

1. Cf. Council of Trent, Session 13, *Decretum de SS. Eucharistiae Sacramento*, c. 7; D. 880 (1646-1647): "If it is not fitting for anyone to approach any sacred functions except in a state of holiness, then certainly to the extent that the holiness and godliness of this heavenly Sacrament is more and more known to the Christian, all the more must he take care that he does not come to receive it without great reverence and holiness, especially because of the fearful words of the Apostle which we read: 'A person who eats and drinks without recognizing the Body of the Lord is eating and drinking his own condemnation' (1 Cor. 11:29). Thus the following precept should be recalled to the one desirous of receiving Holy Communion: 'Let a man so examine himself' (1 Cor. 11:28). Ecclesiastical custom declares that the proving of one's self is necessary, so that no one, conscious of having committed mortal sin, though considering himself contrite, should approach the Holy Eucharist without first having made a sacramental confession. This holy Synod declares that this must perpetually be observed by all Christians, even by priests, whose duty it is to celebrate Mass, as long as there is an

availability of confessors. If in the case of urgent necessity a priest will have celebrated without previous confession, he is to make a confession as soon as possible." Sacred Congregation of the Council, Decree *Sacra Tridentina Synodus*, (20 December 1905): ASS 38 (1905-1906), pp. 400-406; Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Normae pastorales circa absolutionem sacramentalem generali modo impertiendam* (31 July 1972), Norm 1: AAS 64, (1972), p. 511.

2. Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (25 May 1967), 28; AAS 59 (1967), p. 557.
3. Cf. *Ibid.*
4. Cf. *Ibid.*; Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction *Inter Oecumenici* (26 September 1964), 60: AAS 56 (1964), p. 891; Instruction, *Tres abhinc annos* (4 May 1967), 14: AAS 59 (1967), p. 445.
5. Cf. S. Thomas, *Summa Theol.* III, q. 79, a. 7 ad 3 and a. 8 ad 1.
6. Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (25 May 1967), 13: AAS 59 (1967), p. 549.
7. Cf. *Missale Romanum, Institutio generalis Missalis Romani*, 329 a, typical edition 1970, p. 90.
8. Cf. CIC 858, paragraph 1.
9. Motu Proprio, *Sacram Communionem* (19 March 1957), 4; AAS 49 (1957), p. 178.
10. *Ad uxorem* 2, 5: PL 1, 1408.
11. Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, Instruction *Memoriale Domini* (29 May 1969); AAS 61 (1969), p. 542.
12. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7: AAS 56 (1969), pp. 100-101; Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (25 May 1967), 9: AAS 59 (1967), p. 547.
13. Paul VI, Address *Ad Membra Consilii Eucharisticis ex omnibus Nationibus conventibus moderandis habita*: AAS 64 (1972), p. 287.
14. Cf. Lk. 11:3.
15. Cf. Heb. 2:14.

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