



Special Ministers of the Eucharist

A. Texts for Reflection

For the tradition I received from the Lord and also handed on to you is that on the night he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread, and after he had given thanks, he broke it, and he said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' And in the same way, with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me.' Whenever you eat this bread then, and drink this cup, you are proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes. Therefore anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup unworthily is answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone is to examine himself and only then eat or drink from the cup; because a person who eats and drinks without recognising the body is eating and drinking his own condemnation.

St Paul
1 Corinthians 11:23 – 29

The only-begotten Son of God, wishing to enable us to share in his divinity, assumed our nature so that becoming man, he might make men gods.

Moreover, he turned our whole nature, which he assumed, to our salvation. For he offered his body to God the Father on the altar of the cross as a sacrifice for our reconciliation; and he shed his blood for our ransom and our cleansing . . .

Now in order that we might always keep the memory of this great act of love he left us his body as food and his blood as drink, to be received by the faithful under the appearance of bread and wine.

How precious and wonderful is this banquet which brings us salvation and is full of delight! What could be more precious? It is not the meat of calves or kids that is offered . . . At this meal Christ, the true God, is set before us for us to eat. What could be more wonderful than this sacrament?

No sacrament contributes more to our salvation than this: for it purges away our sins, increases our virtues, and nourishes our minds with an abundance of all the spiritual gifts.

It is offered in the Church for the living and the dead, so that it may be beneficial to all, as it was instituted for the salvation of all.

St Thomas Aquinas OP (1225 – 74)
Opusculum 57.1ff

Our Saviour inaugurated the eucharistic sacrifice of his body and blood at the last supper on the night he was betrayed, in order to make his sacrifice of the cross last throughout time until he should return; and indeed to entrust a token to the church, his beloved wife, by which to remember his death and resurrection. It is a sacrament of faithful relationships, a sign of unity, a bond of divine love, a special Easter meal. In it, "Christ is received, the inner self is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us."¹

Vatican II, Decree on the Liturgy (1963)

When [we] take part in the eucharistic sacrifice, the source and culmination of all Christian life, [we] offer to God the divine victim and [ourselves] along with him; and so in this offering and in holy communion all fulfil their own part in the liturgical action . . . refreshed as [we] are by the body of Christ in the sacred gathering, [we] show forth in a concrete way the unity of the people of God, which in this most noble sacrament is both suitably symbolized and wonderfully brought about.

Vatican II, Decree on the Church, n.11 (1964)

At the heart of the Eucharistic celebration are the bread and wine that, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ's body and blood. Faithful to the Lord's command, the Church continue to do, in his memory and until his glorious return, what he did on the eve of his pasison: 'He took bread . . .' 'He took the cup filled with wine . . .' The signs of bread and wine become, in a way surpassing understanding, the body and blood of Christ; they continue to signify also the goodness of creation.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, n.1333 (1994)

Our brothers and sisters are to be entrusted with administering the Eucharist, with taking communion to the sick, and with giving it as viaticum to the dying.

In this ministry you must be examples of Christian living in faith and conduct; you must strive to grow in holiness through this sacrament of unity and love. Remember that, though many, we are one body because we share the one bread and one cup.

As ministers of holy communion, be, therefore, especially observant of the Lord's command to love your neighbour. For when he gave his body as food to his disciple, he said to them: "This is my commandment, that you should love one another as I have loved you."

Instruction from the Rite of Commissioning Special Ministers of the Eucharist (1972)

¹ Divine Office for Feast of Corpus Christi

B. Practicalities

1. Personal preparation
 - a. Clothing – dressing smartly to conduct ministry
 - b. Prayerful preparation
 - c. Demeanour – quiet and unobtrusive
2. Bringing ciborium from the tabernacle
 - a. Timed in order to arrive at the altar during the *Lamb of God*
 - b. Open door then genuflect (always to the open tabernacle)
 - c. Bring ciborium to the altar and place on the corporal with the lid removed
 - d. Withdraw to side of altar (decide beforehand where you will stand)
3. Your own communion
 - a. Usually receive after the priest
 - b. Possibly under both kinds
4. Distributing communion
 - a. Decide location beforehand (along with any other ministers)
 - b. In some places it is a custom to have pupils/servers with a lighted candle lead the ministers to their places and stand beside them (designating this as 'holy space')
 - c. Place host on hand, looking at the host not into the eyes of the person receiving, say "The body of Christ"
 - d. If distributing chalice, hand chalice to person receiving, saying "The blood of Christ", receive chalice back and wipe clean (it is good to rotate the chalice and purificator between recipients); be prepared for intinction (dipping host in the chalice - but note this method of receiving communion has been officially discontinued)
5. Blessings
 - a. Place hand on or above head (what is appropriate?)
 - b. Blessings: "May almighty God bless you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen." ("Amen" slowly to encourage person to join in)
 - c. If a Trinitarian blessing is clearly inappropriate: "May the blessing of almighty God come down upon you and remain with you always. Amen."
6. Accidents
 - a. Be prepared for dropped hosts – you retrieve host and keep it separately – return with it to the altar at the end of communion, if possible, and consume the host
 - b. The same for any substantial crumbs (but do not become obsessively scrupulous about this)
 - c. If the blood of Christ is spilled – soak up with purificator and plenty of water
7. If someone walks off with the host
 - a. Follow them and explain that either they must eat it or return it to you – ask if they are a Catholic and explain – but do all gently, discreetly and kindly
8. After communion
 - a. Be clear whether the priest wants you to help transfer hosts to one ciborium or help with cleansing the sacred vessels
 - b. If taking ciborium back to tabernacle, walk slowly and reverently, holding ciborium in both hands - place in tabernacle – genuflect – then shut the door – wash fingers at credence table

- c. If someone else is returning ciborium to tabernacle, do not move about or continue clearing up – stand and face tabernacle until the door is closed
 - d. The purification of vessels should usually be done at the credence table or at the side of the altar: use thumb or purificator to sweep crumbs from ciboria into the chalice, then add water to chalice and drink, wipe dry with purificator; if vessels are left to later, ensure they are covered and someone takes responsibility for purifying them afterwards
9. Special circumstances
- a. Be aware that some people need to receive a gluten-free host – these will usually be a different shape (square) and should be kept on a separate paten or in a small ciborium
 - b. Try to identify any who may be receiving special hosts before Mass so you are not taken by surprise

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