

RE: Purification of Vessels

In March of 2002 the bishops of the United States received an indult from the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments to allow extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to purify vessels after the distribution of Holy Communion at the discretion of the local bishop. In 2006 the United States bishops sought an extension of that indult and it was denied. Thus, purification of the vessels after Holy Communion is to be carried out by the priest or deacon, or in the absence of a deacon, by an instituted acolyte (GIRM, #163, 183, 192).

This is a natural part of the responsibilities of the priests and deacons as the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion.

There is a distinction between purifying vessels and cleaning the vessels. By purifying vessels, the Congregation for Divine Worship means putting some water in the vessels and then consuming the remains of the consecrated bread or wine. This is what is restricted to priests, deacons and instituted acolytes. Once the vessels are purified, the Congregation for Divine Worship allows us to continue the practice of lay ministers washing the vessels with soap and water. This does not change the ability of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to assist the priests and deacons in consuming any remaining Precious Blood at the conclusion of the Communion Rite.

Both the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, and the United States document, Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds for the Dioceses of the United States, uphold the principle that “Holy Communion has a more complete form as a sign when it is received under both kinds. For in this manner of reception a fuller sign of the Eucharistic banquet shines forth.” (GIRM, #281, Norms, #20) Distribution and reception of Holy Communion under both species has been the practice in the parishes of the Diocese of Altoona Johnstown for some time, to the benefit of the faithful. There should be no change to this laudable practice and Communion from the Chalice should continue and be encouraged for all the faithful.

Options to Consider in the Purification of Vessels after Holy Communion

In General

- ! Deacons and Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are to consume what remains of the Precious Blood from their chalice of distribution.
- ! If there are only a few Communion vessels, they may be purified at the credence table following the Communion Rite. However, this should not be prolonged and it should not decrease the period of silence after Communion during which the faithful sit or kneel in silent prayer and reflection.
- ! For a large number of Communion vessels, it is permissible to wait until after Mass has ended, rather than to purify them at the altar or the credence table during Mass (cf. GIRM, #183).

- ! In this case, the vessels are set on the credence table on a corporal, suitably covered with an appropriately clean cloth. After Mass, they may be taken to the sacristy where they are purified by either the deacon or the priest after he has greeted the people. After they have been purified they can be washed by the sacristan or other minister as usual.
- ! If there are a large number of chalices to be purified, or if time constraints warrant it, the priest may purify by pouring water into the first chalice, swirling the water around in the customary manner, and then pouring it into the next chalice, and then into the next, etc. After he has done so with the last chalice to be purified, he consumes the ablution. The vessels may then be washed by the sacristan or other minister as usual.
- ! As part of the ongoing formation of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and sacristans, these directives should be made known and explained to them.

In Parishes and Institutions where there is a deacon(s) or instituted acolyte assigned

- ! At Masses where a deacon is scheduled, it is most appropriate that, after Mass, he should purify the vessels before they are washed as usual.
- ! At Masses where an instituted acolyte is scheduled, he assists with the purification of vessels as needed.

In Parishes and Institutions or Masses where there is no deacon assigned

- ! The chalices and other Communion vessels may be taken to the sacristy after the completion of the celebration of Mass.
- ! The priest celebrant purifies the vessels after he has finished greeting the people. He may be assisted by other priests of the parish.