



DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON
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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

BISHOP'S LETTER ADDRESSES LITURGY

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

In the last five years, our Diocesan Church has been on a great journey of faith, marked by several important milestones. The Ninth Diocesan Synod reaffirmed the place of the Diocese in the Mission of Christ and set as a goal "to promote and strengthen on-going liturgical renewal in the parishes of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston." Our Sesquicentennial Celebration in 2000 focused attention on the heritage of faith that we have received and are challenged to hand on to the next generation.

Following these two important events, I published a series of pastoral letters on the Sacraments of the Church, beginning and ending with reflections on the Eucharist, "the source of communion and the call to mission." At the same time, the Diocesan Pastoral Council developed a Diocesan Mission Statement which commits us to "a deeper life of prayer and more vibrant liturgies." In many ways, these events all led to the celebration of the First Diocesan Eucharistic Congress, where we gathered as one Church around the Table of the Lord and from which we were sent forth on mission.

All of these events remind us that, as Catholic Christians, we are a Eucharistic people who draw our identity from and who find our fulfillment in Jesus Christ made truly present in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Because the Eucharist is of such importance to us, the noble and fruitful celebration of the Sacred Liturgy, the Mass, is a pastoral priority.

The purpose of *The General Instruction to the Third Edition of the Roman Missal (GIRM)*, published in 2000 and now being implemented in the dioceses of the United States, is two-fold: to support the on-going liturgical reform initiated by the Second Vatican Council; and, to encourage the full, active, and conscious participation of each member of the faithful in the celebration of the Mass, each according to his or her own proper role. The Instruction does this, first of all, by recalling that the Church is one, a communion of believers bound together. Just as there is unity in the Church, so too there should be unity in celebration of the sacraments of the Church, especially the Eucharist. Thus, the Instruction challenges us to avoid parochialism in the liturgy and reminds us that, in celebrating the Mass, we are united with millions of fellow believers across time and

Posture at Mass

Proper Posture of the Congregation at Mass
in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston



From the start of Mass
until the first reading



From the preparation of
the gifts until the priest
has finished washing his
hands or the deacon has
incensed the congregation



During the readings and
Psalm



From the priest's
invitation, "Pray, brothers
and sisters ..."



From the Gospel
acclamation to the end
of the Gospel



From the end of the Holy,
Holy, Holy until after the
amen of the Eucharistic
prayer



During the homily



From the start of the Our
Father until the reception
of Communion



From the profession of
faith until the end of the
general intercessions



Or  Or 
After receiving Communion



From the start of the
prayer after Communion
until the end of Mass

Promulgated by Bishop Bernard W. Schmitt
Solemnity of All Saints, November 1, 2003

space. As Catholic Christians, "the way we do it in our Church" can have only one meaning: the parish celebration of the Mass is intimately connected to the Diocesan celebration of the Mass which, in turn, is intimately connected to the universal Church's celebration of the Mass that finds its source in Christ's Last Supper and His Sacrifice on the Cross. There are legitimate areas of adaptation in parishes and in dioceses, but the Mass belongs to the whole Church and our celebration of the Mass reflects our union with the whole Church. This is the most basic lesson of the General Instruction, a theological understanding that should not be overlooked.

As the provisions of the new General Instruction are implemented in parishes, there are relatively few things that are new. Among the provisions for the whole Church, there are two instances where some change may be experienced. First, the lay faithful will be invited to stand during the Preparation of the Altar and the Gifts at a slightly different

time: all are to begin standing from the priest's invitation "Pray brothers and sisters ..." before the Prayer over the Gifts. Second, "when receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the Sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister. [...] When communion is received under both kinds, the sign of reverence is also made before receiving the Precious Blood" (GIRM, 160). As with the provisions I will make below for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, proper catechesis on the reasons for these norms should be given during their implementation. I have asked the Diocesan Office of Liturgical Practices to make available catechetical aids for pastoral ministers, Parish Pastoral Councils and their Liturgical Committees, and for all members of the faithful. At the same time, the Office of Liturgical Practices is preparing a simple directory for parishes to use in identifying and implementing relevant sections of the General Instruction. The goal is not merely to avoid confusion, but to know what we as a Church are doing and why we are doing it. Full, active, and conscious participation in the Mass demands this of us all.

There are several matters which the General Instruction leaves to the decision of the Diocesan Bishop. Not all of these regard the celebration of the Mass itself and many, such as the appointment of a Diocesan Art and Architecture Commission (291) and the discipline of concelebration (202, 387) have already been made and remain unchanged. Other areas, such as the options for liturgical music (48, 62, 67) and the development of Diocesan Norms for Altar Servers (107), I am giving to the Diocesan Liturgical Commission and its Liturgical Music Commission for further study. There remain two principal areas that I want to address here: the question of posture, especially during the Communion Rite, and Communion under Both Kinds.

The whole question of posture reminds us that the nature of the Mass is to be an act of the whole people gathered together as one. The actions and the posture of the faithful should be a visible sign of their unity in faith and spirit. For this reason, the liturgical posture and actions of the faithful are best called communal (not public). Within this communal action there are profoundly personal moments; indeed, within the communion of faith, the communal is personal and the personal is communal. The structure of the Liturgy takes this reality into account, balancing moments of silent reflection with moments of communal prayer and response. Similarly, the balancing of the communal and the personal are reflected in posture; there are times when all are called to do the same thing and times when personal expressions are allowed.

And so, I decree that, in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, the faithful will stand during the Communion Rite, from the Great Amen until the beginning of the Communion Procession. In other words, the faithful will remain standing after the Lamb of God (43). Upon the return of each one from receiving Communion, the members of the faithful are free to choose that posture which is best suited

to their personal adoration of and devotion to the Body and Blood of Christ they have just received. Those members of the faithful who wish to sit or kneel following the reception of Holy Communion are to be permitted to do so; those who wish to stand until all have received Holy Communion are likewise permitted to do so. Legitimate diversity in this personal moment of devotion is to be respected; any existing parish practice or guideline should be revised in such a way as to recognize either option as equally acceptable.

In the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds has long been encouraged on all occasions where it is possible, without serious inconvenience. I hereby decree this is to be the norm in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston (283). As with everything, proper catechesis must be offered to the faithful on the reception of Holy Communion as a profound encounter with Jesus Christ. In particular, the method of receiving under both kinds (without *undue* preoccupation with sanitary procedures), the proper sign of reverence, and the spirit of communal adoration are all matters that need to be addressed. At the same time, both ordinary and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should receive renewed catechetical and spiritual formation regarding their ministry.

Because of the importance of the catechesis in the implementation of these norms, both universal and diocesan, I want to allow a suitable period of time for parishes to engage in study and discussion. And so, I promulgate these norms on the Solemnity of All Saints, November 1, 2003 and make them effective on the Second Sunday of the Year, January 18, 2004.

In closing, I want to emphasize that the General Instruction and these specific norms are aimed at encouraging all members of the faithful to fully, consciously, and actively exercise their proper role in the celebration of the Mass. For the lay faithful, this means becoming ever more aware of their duty to offer their lives and their very selves, together with the priest's offering of the Bread and Wine in their name. This profound act of offering all to God, from whom all comes, is both communal and personal. It calls for reverently praying and responding aloud, joyful singing, and silently meditating. The Sacred Liturgy brings together all these things and harmonizes them, just as it brings us together with Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, the source of our communion and our mission.

With personal regards and prayerful best wishes, I am,

Sincerely in Christ,



Most Reverend Bernard W. Schmitt
Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston

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