

The Third Edition of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal *especially written for deacons*

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Introduction

The purpose of this article is to give a basic introduction for deacons to the 2002 third edition of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM). While the article covers many important topics from the 2002 GIRM, it is important that ministers of the liturgy read the entire document and other supporting directives which complement it. Please see the listing at the end of this article for other helpful sources.

In truth, there is much more that is the same in the new GIRM as in the previous one. It continues to be a very positive document which carries on the reform of the liturgy by adding new directives and as we will see adding more strength to some original principles found in the previous GIRM. This article will first look at the background of the GIRM, point out what has been reinforced from the previous edition and finally examine what has been added to this newer version.

Background

First, a little background about this document. About 40 years ago, John XXIII called together a Council now known as Vatican II. We have all been deeply affected by its results, most notably and visibly in the way we pray liturgically. But the purpose of this Council was to reform the entire church, not just the liturgy. Certainly the Council Fathers knew well the term *lex orandi, lex credendi* - the way we pray tells us what we believe - as the first thing they did in this reform of the church was to call for a reform of how we pray. They did this by scripting the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (CSL).

The vision of the Church as a sacrament and as a sign of the Kingdom on earth could only be shaped into being through the prayer life of the church which is what truly forms the People of God into the Body of Christ. This was the reason for writing the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* and calling for a liturgical reform.

If one concept could summarize the entire reform of the liturgy and the church at Vatican II it would be the battle cry of the liturgical movement for “full, conscious and active participation” of the faithful in the whole life of the church, particularly its prayer life. These words were forever fixed into church teaching in the CSL. In effect these words say that every baptized member of the church *matters* and indeed are necessary for the prayer and life of the church, not just as spectators but as conscious participants. This principle is something we need to keep in mind as we read the GIRM.

CSL called the celebration of the Eucharist the “source and summit” of the Christian life. In other words, the transforming effect of the Eucharist is that to which we aim our lives and it is

also the very thing which strengthens us to be transformers of the world. Nothing else in the life of the Church has as powerful an effect on its members than the celebration of the liturgy, particularly the Eucharistic celebration. This means that there is a deep connection between how we live our lives in the world and what we do at the table of the Lord each Sunday. And I believe that is especially true of the role of the deacon whose very name comes from the Greek *diakonia* which as you know means “service.”

Keeping these and other principles in mind, the Constitution called for a reform of the rites of the church and in the following years new rites were developed for all of the Sacramental celebrations including of course the Liturgy of the Eucharist. With the Eucharist at the heart of our faith it could be said that the second most important document after the Constitution is the GIRM. Copies of the new GIRM are available from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and will eventually be included in the introduction to the new *Sacramentary for Mass*. It is important to remember that the GIRM is not a launching point from which we can go and do our own thing, but rather it is a binding document for how the liturgy is to be regularly celebrated.

The most interesting and significant comment to make about the current GIRM is that we are looking at the third edition of this document since 1969. When you consider that the previous instruction for the Roman Missal prior to Vatican II was virtually unchanged for about 400 years, we realize that 3 editions in 40 years is a testimony to another principle found in the CSL that “sound tradition be retained and yet the way remain open to legitimate progress.”

We must also be conscious of the fact that the initial texts which the CSL called for in the 1960's were very different from what came before as any here who lived through the changes could attest to. The reformers could not possibly envision what would work and what would need clearer definition. As time has gone on, this has become more apparent and needs un-imagined when these rites were first composed 30 years ago are now necessary. And that is why we have before us today the third edition of the GIRM.

I. GENERAL REMARKS

Regarding the publication of the new GIRM, we are living in very interesting times because while the General Instruction has been both translated into English and promulgated for use, the rest of the book (the rituals and prayers and rubrics) has not been translated or approved for use. In essence, we have been given the instruction manual on how to put together the desk from IKEA, but we have not received the parts. Or perhaps a better way of saying it is that we have the parts, the old *Sacramentary*, but they are not exactly the ones for which the instructions were written. However, you should know that the new GIRM has been promulgated and therefore supercedes any previous editions.

Just because a document has been promulgated, however, does not mean that there is not time given to implement it. In fact, it would probably be safe to say that there has not yet been a single Mass, in a parish or a monastery; cathedral liturgies and papal masses included, at which every single norm, instruction and rubric of the liturgy has been carried out. If we have not, then, after 35 plus years been able to fully implement the old Roman Missal with it's GIRM, ought we feel

that we should have the new one completely and painstakingly implemented by “next Sunday?”
No!

This is not to say that pastors and ministers can pick and choose which rubrics and directives they want to obey; every effort should be made to implement the liturgy as we have received it. Still, liturgy is an organic thing and as with all living beings, useful things tend to grow and gain strength while weaker elements tend to die off. Some things, yes, need to be implemented as soon as possible while others are going to take time to grow on the people of God, and it is up to pastoral ministers to support these changes and encourage their growth.

In the new GIRM there are many powerful liturgical norms but at times they can seem to be juxtaposed by more particular directives. In paragraph #179 of the GIRM regarding the role of the deacon at Mass, it says that at the altar, the deacon is to assist the presider with the book and the cup. However, there is also a clear directive in #179 that the deacon is to kneel for part of the Eucharistic prayer. This seems contradictory as the deacon cannot assist at the table while kneeling.

The exact wording in #179 is that the deacon “normally” kneels after the holy, holy. Some pastoral reasons as to why this may be impractical could include the deacons ability to kneel, the architectural design of the church and the number of concelebrants.

It should also be noted that nothing ought to detract attention from the primary symbols and actions of the Eucharistic, namely the altar itself, the Eucharistic Prayer and the elements of bread and wine. If the deacon kneels it should be done discretely and unnoticeably; the use of anything as obstructive and distracting as a kneeler near the altar is forbidden. In any case, this example particularly relevant to deacons is used to point out the occasional differences between the norms of this document and some of its directives. Pastoral considerations will need to be made; however, they should not be done randomly but consistently under the direction of the local pastor.

A final general remark on the GIRM is that there is a clear concern for defining the roles of various ministers, including and especially the ordained. Admittedly there is an accent placed particularly on the priest presider in this document, but greater role is also placed on the role of the deacon.

Now whether that stress on the ordained excites you or upsets you, there is one clear point here: the reformed liturgy depends a lot on the ordained minister. You can make the liturgy or break it. So ask yourself before each Mass, “Is it going to be the liturgy of *we* or the liturgy of *me*?” “Am I focusing people on the presence of God or on the presence of myself?” Do I know what I am doing up in the sanctuary? Do I understand my role in every part of the Mass? Could I step into it at a moments notice, not because I am well versed and rehearsed, but because the role of deacon is part of who I am as a follower of Christ? This is the sign of any good liturgical minister.

Particular Changes

The reason you are probably reading this article about the new GIRM is probably to find out the answer to the question: “What’s different?” The truth is, there is nothing startlingly new in the 2002 GIRM that was not already in the previous edition. There are some definite particular changes in the celebration of the Mass as will be pointed out below, but what is truly remarkable is the way the church took great pains to further enforce liturgical directives found in the previous GIRM, so the purpose of this new document is not only to create additional guidelines but also to make certain that the central items which have already been given to us are being done and being done well. Those items can be summed up in these topics: Silence and Singing in the Liturgy, Receiving Communion from the Altar and Receiving Communion Under Both Species. All of these will be examined more closely below.

Some of the things that follow may seem to apply only to priests who preside at Mass, but remember that deacons can preside at certain other liturgies, too. Even though the GIRM speaks about Mass, it’s guidelines for presiding ought to be observed at any liturgical celebration.

Insertions from other Documents

The second edition of the GIRM came out in 1975. Obviously other liturgical documents and rituals have come out since then and the new GIRM has been edited to include these changes. For example, the new GIRM mentions the altar as being a symbol of Christ, language taken from the 1977 *Rite of Dedicating an Altar and a Church*.

Information about the liturgy of the word was lifted right out of the 1981 second edition of the *Lectionary for Mass*. It notes particularly two things: silence and the *Book of the Gospels*. We will look at silence now and then the *Book of the Gospels*.

In number 56, we see a new directive adding emphasis on silence in the liturgy: “During the liturgy of the word it is appropriate to include brief periods of silence...in which at the prompting of the Holy Spirit the word of God may be grasped by the heart...it may be appropriate after the readings and at the conclusion of the homily.” This is the first of the three major re-assertions from the previous GIRM: the use of silence. This would also be a good opportunity to look at the opposite of silence: singing.

For over 35 years now we have all heard the priest at Mass begin the Opening Prayer after the Gloria with the words, “Let us pray” which is supposed to be followed by a period of silent prayer. But it would probably be no exaggeration to say that at over half of our Masses, the priest does not pause at all and immediately reads the opening prayer.

It is not an easy thing to lead silence as a presider. Silent moments seem much longer to the person who is presiding over them than they actually are. Because of this, it may be necessary for the presider to count silently to make sure there are at least ten seconds of silent prayer. If he does this, it won’t be long before the presider can get a feeling for the time and finally pray himself during these silent periods. Soon, the assembly will learn to pray during these silent moments, too. The new GIRM points out that these silent moments ought to occur at the Opening Prayer, after the readings and the homily and after the communion song.

The opposite of silence is singing, and in #40 of the new GIRM, there is an addition worth noting. It says that, “every care should be taken that singing by the ministers and the people is not absent in celebrations that occur on Sundays and holy days of obligation.” So you want to know what’s different in the new GIRM? Sunday singing is not an option. There ought not to be a 7:30 AM Sunday morning golfers Mass: out by eight, teeing off by nine. Singing is one of the primary ways in which the assembly participates in the liturgy and it should not be left out of any Sunday Mass.

A final insertion in the new GIRM comes from the Bishop’s Ceremonial which tells us that flowers are not to be used during Lent and are only to be used in moderation during Advent #305.

40 Years of Experience

Forty years of organic liturgy have caused some things to die off and new things to grow. The church has recognized this and has pruned some dead branches. For example, you no longer need to find a place for women to proclaim readings outside the sanctuary. Yes, it was in the old GIRM. Also, chalice veils, while laudable, are no longer required.

In terms of new growths, for those who like to preach from the aisle, congratulations, you may now do so with the church’s blessing. The previous GIRM said only from the ambo or (standing) at the chair; the new one says “or another suitable place.” And another emendation is quite significant: namely that the presider may hold not only a piece of the broken consecrated host but the chalice as well after the Lamb of God in order to invite the people to communion. This in itself clearly stresses the Church’s desire that the people receive communion under both species.

This brings us to our second major reassertion found in the new GIRM: Communion under both species. The new GIRM has been rewritten in such a way that it envisions communion under both kinds as normative. In fact, they removed the line from the old GIRM which stated that communion could be given under both kinds at the discretion of the bishop, which is to say you no longer need the bishop’s permission to give out the blood of Christ to the people at Mass. It is normative. It is what the Church does. Receiving under both species is an integral part of who we are and how we worship as Catholics.

However, the old GIRM had few rubrics regarding how to do communion under both species because it was new. In the US what was done inadvertently was to allow the Ministers of Communion to assume some of the roles of the deacon, especially in a time before there were many permanent deacons on hand, so they were able to fill roles such as pouring the precious blood and separating the body of Christ into the plates. We are now being told that they cannot fulfill these roles. The document by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops entitled “Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America.” Explains this in greater detail and is well worth reading.

Regardless of the new restrictions on lay ministers at Mass, it is quite clear that the church envisions the offering of the cup to all present to be normative at all Sunday gatherings.

II. MASS WITH A DEACON

The section “Mass with a Deacon” is found in numbers 171 through 186 and every deacon should read these paragraphs in the new GIRM. Before moving to the Introductory Rites, a few preliminary remarks need to be made. There should never be a need for more than two deacons at your “average” Sunday Mass in a parish. While it is permissible for one deacon to do the role of the word while another deacon does the role of the altar, it is perfectly acceptable for one deacon to serve the entire Mass. There is no such thing as a “concelebrating” deacon, so except for the most exceptional or festive cases, only deacons needed to serve at Mass ought to be vested at the altar.

It ought to be pointed out here that while the GIRM implies that if a deacon is present at Mass, he should be serving, the church does recognize that many deacons are called to two vocations: ordination and marriage. It would never be the church’s intention to separate husbands from wives or children particularly during the celebration of the Mass, the ultimate symbol of Christian unity. Even in parishes with only one deacon, they may do well to see that at some masses they are still attending with their family. This is something that needs to be worked out with the pastor and the way deacons are scheduled to serve at Mass.

Introductory Rites

The deacon should arrive 15 to 30 minutes before Mass begins. He should vest in alb and a deacon stole and a dalmatic as the occasion warrants. If incense is used at Mass, the deacon may assist the presider in getting it ready immediately before the procession begins. For the most part the presider can handle this but making sure the charcoal is lit and the thurifer is in the right place at the right time is a godsend. It is really the role of the presider to actually place the incense in the thurible.

The deacon always walks in procession carrying the *Book of the Gospels* and never the *Lectionary*. The *Lectionary* is never processed in and should be on the ambo open to the correct page before Mass begins. The deacon with the gospel book walks in FRONT of ALL concelebrating priests holding the book slightly elevated.

The deacon is never replaced by a reader in this role unless of course there is no deacon present. A deacon carrying the Gospel book does not bow to the altar but simply places it flat on the altar directly in the center, face down so it is in the correct position for the Gospel procession later in the Mass. Then he waits for the presider and together they kiss the altar.

The deacon may then assist the priest with incensing the altar and the cross and then go to his place. There may be a chair placed temporarily next to the priest’s chair for the deacon, but if there are several deacons present they should not be seated all around the presider giving the appearance that the liturgy is being presided over by a committee. The role of the priest (or bishop) presider should not be obscured by other ordained ministers.

During the Act of Penitence, if option c is used, the deacon proclaims the invocations with the “Lord have mercy.” Please note that there are many different versions of this litany and the one best suited for the season of the church year or readings of the day should be chosen. It is important to be heard: does the microphone at the chair need to be shared or is there a portable microphone that the deacon can prepare ahead of time and have ready for these and other moments.

Liturgy of the Word

During the Liturgy of the Word, it is the deacon’s ordinary role to proclaim the Gospel, and he should not be superceded by a priest or even a bishop in this role. If there are no readers present the deacon may proclaim all the readings, but if there are readers present, the deacon does not supercede them in their role as readers.

There are several steps to doing a Gospel procession well. If incense is to be used, the deacon may assist the presider in preparing it. When the music for the alleluia begins, the deacon stands and asks for the presider’s blessing and makes the sign of the cross when it is given to him. Then he walks over to the altar and bows profoundly, and ideally as the very first “alleluia” is sung, the deacon lifts up the Gospel book reverently off the altar. He then processes to the ambo.

The timing and coordination of this entire process needs to be choreographed with the music. Remember that the purpose of the acclamation is to accompany the procession, so it may be necessary for the acclamation to be extended.

If incense and candles are used, these precede the Gospel book to the ambo, again something to be carefully choreographed and rehearsed prior to the liturgy. Ideally, by the time the last note of the alleluia is played the Gospel book should be opened to the correct page and the deacon should be all ready to proclaim the gospel (eyeglasses included). Otherwise, this magnificently flowing liturgical procession comes to a screeching halt in an awkward silence while the deacon is trying to find the page, etc.

“The Lord be with you” should be the first thing the people hear after the last note of the acclamation is played. The people respond and the deacon says “A reading from the holy Gospel according to John,” and makes the sign of the cross over the text and then his forehead, lips and heart. If incense is used now is the time he takes it from the server and incenses the book.

The Gospel is proclaimed and finished with the words, “The Gospel of the Lord.” Then the deacon kisses the gospel while saying privately which means no one is to hear it “May the words of the Gospel wipe away our sins.” These are the only prescribed words to be used at this time, and regardless of what you may have experienced, they are not to be changed. It is not “My brothers and sisters, the Lord be with you,” but rather it is “The Lord be with you.” (Incidentally, even in the new GIRM there is no indication that this is said with arms extended). It is not “Today’s reading comes to us from the Gospel of St. Luke” - It is “A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke” It is not “The good news of salvation” it is “The Gospel of the Lord.”

If we respect the liturgy's language and rites, they will speak for themselves. When we add our own words and actions, we obscure the language of the liturgy.

If a bishop is presiding (not a priest), he has the option of kissing the Gospel book after it is proclaimed by the deacon, and in addition the bishop may bless the people with the book. The deacon must be informed before hand if this is the case so he knows what to do, but unless you are told that the bishop wants to kiss the Gospel book and bless the people with it, you should presume that it is not being done. If you are told the bishop is going to kiss the Gospel then you should not kiss it. (GIRM 175)

Finally, the Gospel book is to be placed on the credence table or another appropriate and dignified place which could include leaving it right on the ambo itself. The floor is never an appropriate or dignified place.

The new GIRM reminds us in several places that the deacon may, on occasion, give the homily at Mass (GIRM 171), but the ordinary homilist at any liturgy is the presider which means that the majority of our Masses should be preached at by the presiding bishop or priest. Deacons may preach at Mass, but that is something which needs to be worked out and planned accordingly with the pastor, especially given the number of deacons in a given parish.

The primary reason deacons receive faculties to preach are at occasions at which they are presiding. By virtue of their ordination deacons can preside at certain liturgies such as wakes, baptisms and weddings which occur outside of Mass but still require a homily.

It is the role of the deacon to proclaim the petitions during the prayer of the faithful. The GIRM (#71) says this should be done from the ambo or another suitable place which could include the chair as long as you have some kind of microphone in order to be heard. Obviously you need to be sure that there is a copy of the intercessions readily available to the deacon wherever he proclaims them from.

When there is no deacon present they are read by a reader at the ambo. Obviously if necessary and spatially feasible, the deacon may proclaim them from the ambo, too. Be certain to prepare before Mass by reading over and praying with the Gospel passage of the day and reviewing the wording of the General Intercessions.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

After the Prayer of the faithful all are seated and the deacon prepares the altar while the priest remains at the chair. This should be done immediately after the prayer of the faithful during the collection so as not to delay things later. The deacon moves with the priest to receive the gifts from the people. Acolytes or altar servers may also assist.

The deacon hands the priest the bread for Mass and adds the water to the wine saying as he does so, "By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity." Then he hands the chalice to the priest.

If incense is used he assists the priest with incensing the gifts, altar and cross. The deacon or the server may incense the priest and the people.

During the Eucharistic Prayer the deacon stands near the priest but slightly behind him so he may assist the priest with the chalice or the book. At the end of the Eucharistic Prayer the deacon holds the chalice while the priest holds the plate for the doxology. The deacon does not sing or say the doxology – only the priest says it. Please remember to hold the chalice at the same height as the plate and put it down when the priest puts his down.

After the Prayer for Peace, it is the deacon's role to invite the assembly to share the sign of peace.

Communion Rite

There are several changes to be noted in the new GIRM during the Communion Rite for both deacons and lay ministers of communion. (See *Norms* #37 - 40)

1. Only ordained ministers may break the bread and pour the cup during the Lamb of God. Ordinarily the deacon should pour out the chalices and the priest separate the hosts into the plates. This may take a little longer and the music minister should be alerted to this change. Like the gospel acclamation, the Lamb of God is to accompany the action of the breaking of the bread: more tropes can be added.
2. The ministers of communion are not to approach the altar until the priest has received communion.
3. No self communicating. The deacon is to receive under both species from the priest. Neither the deacon nor any lay minister may ever take communion as a priest or concelebrant does; they must receive it in the customary fashion.
4. In the previous GIRM it said that the deacon was to receive from the cup after the faithful: this is no longer the case in the new GIRM which clearly says that the deacon must receive under both species after the priest.
5. According to the new norms, only ordained ministers can hand the communion vessels to the ministers of communion, so be conscious of this and ready to assist the priest in handing out the vessels if necessary. Make certain this is done with reverence and dignity, in a slow and careful manner.
6. The deacons primary role in the communion rite is to distribute the Blood of Christ. Just as the deacon assists with the chalice during the Eucharistic Prayer, now he gives it to the people. A priest always gives out the Body of Christ and a deacon always gives out the Blood of Christ. Priests and deacons do not take the Body of Christ and lay ministers take the cups. Priests take the Body of Christ and if there are more plates than priests, deacons or lay ministers can assist them. Deacons take the Blood of Christ and if there are more cups than deacons, priests or lay ministers can assist them.

7. After communion all remaining Precious Blood must be consumed by the deacon, priest and/or Ministers of Communion. The purifying and washing of sacred vessels may be done by any ordained or lay Minister of Communion, but normally should take place after Mass has ended and if during Mass, not at the altar.
8. Finally, another change in the communion rite which affects deacons and all present is the sign of reverence to be made before receiving communion: a simple bow of the head to the Body *and* Blood of Christ before receiving each.

Concluding Rites

The new GIRM says that after the prayer after communion the deacon can make brief announcements," if indeed any need to be made." Every little thing does not need to be announced at Mass. Indeed, only those things which are directly related to the pastoral life of the church should be made at this time so it is visible how they connect to the Eucharistic life of the parish. The priest may also make the announcements.

If there is a prayer over the people or a solemn blessing at the end of Mass, the deacon says "bow your heads and pray for God's blessing." This follows immediately after the priest says, "The Lord be with you." Then the deacon dismisses the people by saying "The Mass is ended, go in peace."

The deacon kisses the altar with the priest, makes a bow and processes out. The Gospel book is not processed out as the People of God who have heard the word of God proclaimed are now themselves the bearers of the word as they leave at the end of Mass.

A few more significant changes:

The altar cross is to have the image of Christ crucified on it. (GIRM #117, #308)

Nothing extraneous is to be placed on the altar like flowers (GIRM#305). This means that only Eucharistic vessels and elements, the *Sacramentary* and if necessary the cross and candles for Mass may be placed on the altar. The so called "wedding candle" or "unity candle" is never to be placed on the altar. A side table or stand should be employed for this or any other object needed during a Mass (ashes, holy water, etc)

Even at Mass with just a minister, readings should be done from the ambo.

On solemn occasions, the use of more precious vestments is encouraged (GIRM #346)

If there is a tabernacle in the sanctuary, one genuflects only twice during Mass - at the beginning of the liturgy as you approach the sanctuary before reverencing the altar and at the end after reverencing the altar. All other times moving through the sanctuary you bow to the altar. (GIRM #274)

It is directed that the Act of Penitence and the Opening Prayer ought to be done from the chair, not the altar (GIRM #256 - #258)

Also in liturgies where a sequence is used such as on Pentecost it used to follow the format of Alleluia/Sequence/Gospel; now it is Sequence/Alleluia/Gospel. (GIRM #64)

Note the following difference in posture during the preparation of gifts from the previous GIRM to the new one:

Previous GIRM

PRIEST:

Pray, brethren, that this our sacrifice
may be acceptable to God the almighty Father

PEOPLE:

May the Lord accept this sacrifice from your
hands, for the praise and glory of his name,
for our good and the good of all his church.

ASSEMBLY STANDS

2002 GIRM

PRIEST:

Pray, brethren, that this our sacrifice
may be acceptable to God the
almighty Father

ASSEMBLY STANDS

PEOPLE:

May the Lord accept this
sacrifice from your
hands, for the praise and glory of his
name,
for our good and the good of
all his church.

It is absolutely necessary that the people be informed about this change ahead of time, with information in the bulletin for example, and that it be clearly explained at Mass before it is tried. A simple gesture with the hands by the priest or the cantor to remind the assembly when to stand may be necessary until it becomes second nature. It will be necessary to explain not only how it is to be done but why it is being done.

The reason for this change comes from the CSL's call for full, conscience, active participation by the people at Mass. The request to stand at this moment magnifies the dialogical nature of the liturgy between presider and assembly. The priest is standing as he speaks and the people are now required to stand in order to reply, just as when someone walks into a room, a polite person stands to greet them. So here the people stand to reply to the priest's call to prayer.

The new GIRM says that the Priest is bound to receive communion from what has been consecrated at that Mass which is not altogether new but it puts that in the context of the faithful doing the same:

“It is most desirable that the faithful, just as the priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord's Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and that...they partake of the chalice” (GIRM #85). It also particularly notes in #157 that a host consecrated at that Mass must be held up to invite people for communion.

This is the third major reassertion of the new GIRM: Communion from the Altar. In simple terms, what the new GIRM is saying here is stop serving communion from the tabernacle at Mass. One could argue that people who receive from the tabernacle are experiencing more of a communion service than a Mass. Although it certainly fulfills their Sunday obligation, receiving from the tabernacle is a less than perfect sign of their participation in the Eucharist. The assembly have a right not just to receive communion but to fully participate in the Sacrament of the Eucharist *at which they are celebrating*. It takes planning and an awareness of how many people come to each parish Mass, but it can and should be done out of respect for the spiritual lives of all those assembled for worship.

Obviously we need hosts in the tabernacle for prayer and for the sick and yes, if you run out of hosts during communion of course you may take some from the tabernacle. But the practice of regularly going to the tabernacle during the Lamb of God for hosts for the assembly should not be happening. The *intention* at the beginning of every Mass should be to consecrate enough hosts for all who are present.

The doxology at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer is only proclaimed by the priest(s) and not by the deacon or the assembly. The doxology is the great ending of the Eucharistic Prayer (Through him, with him, in him...”), and just as only the priest says, “We ask this through Christ our Lord” at the end of the presidential prayers, so too does the priest say or sing the doxology. It is the role of the assembly, however, to sing the Great Amen afterwards. (GIRM #236)

The priest and ministers of the altar are not to go wandering around the church for the sign of peace. The purpose of this rite is to recognize the unifying presence of Christ within the assembly, so the impression that the peace is handed down from the priest to the people is to be avoided. It has been noted, however, that at such events as weddings or funerals or when a special dignitary is present, the presider may greet some of the assembly (GIRM #154).

In the previous GIRM, there was no indication that the assembly was to kneel for the Agnus Dei, but now it is permitted in #43. In the United States it is up to each bishop to decide and the bishops of New Jersey have agreed that the people should kneel from after the singing of the Lamb of God until they stand to receive communion. They may, however, remain standing when they return to their pews until all have received communion.

The GIRM is quite clear in #160 that there may be no self-communicating by the faithful. In other words, no lay minister or deacon should ever take a host from a plate and receive it or pick up a cup from the altar and drink it. Communion is to be appropriately given by the minister and respectfully received by the faithful.

III. THE DEACON AT MASS

Sometimes with all of these rubrics and rules, we can lose touch with the fact that the liturgy and the prayer life of the church is not meant to be an end in itself but rather a means to an end. The purpose of the church’s liturgy is to do several things, namely to remember and experience first

hand for ourselves the revealed presence of God through the person of Jesus Christ and to respond to God through Christ with expressions of faith. The liturgy also serves to unite us as members of God's family, to strengthen us to build God's kingdom and most importantly to form us into the body of Christ.

We do not want to become like the very people Jesus criticized in the gospels who understood well the laws of the Sabbath but completely forgot its purpose. The CSL stresses the importance of the entire assembly and its symbolic value revealing the presence of Christ, but the ordained ministers also carry with them an important witness value that speaks to us of who we are as church. That is certainly no less true of the deacon. To take a ministry and establish it as ordained means that it is central to the faith and immensely important in our understanding of who we are. To further give that ministry specific roles in the liturgy means that all this order stands for needs to be clearly before us, reminding us of who we are and what we ought to be.

The ministry of the deacon can be summed up in one single word: service. Lives of service begin right in the Mass itself. It should be abundantly clear that the purpose of every liturgical minister is to serve the assembly. Ministers are not ministers to be on display before the people, but they are there first and foremost to serve those who come to worship.

Kevin Irwin, a liturgical theologian, said that, "I would think that the relationship of the deacon's service at the altar and to the poor images for all of us the kind of ministerial life which Eucharistic participation presumes" (Irwin). In other words, before the deacon opens his mouth to preach the Gospel or hands the people the Blood of Christ, he is by his very presence a symbol which ties the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist with the needs of the poor. The deacon, whose first calling is to serve those most in need, is a witness of God's real presence in the world made manifest through the outreach of the church, particularly in the local parish community in which he serves.

Fr. James Maroney of the U.S. bishop's liturgical office put it this way: "For just as the Eucharistic celebration is the source of all authentic Christian spirit and the summit of the entire Christian life, what the church does at liturgy is the prototype for what (it) does in life. The deacon servant of the poor is thus the deacon servant of the altar." (Maroney)

It is very true that everything we do in the liturgy must ritualize a lived reality. The bread and wine becoming the real presence of Christ only takes on meaning when that presence is made manifest in the world, especially to those most suffering and in need. A true symbol participates in the reality it signifies. Deacons at liturgy call to the assembly to live out the Eucharist they receive through lives of service.

This cry for justice is especially heard in the proclamation of the Gospel. The Gospel messages, sometimes discomfiting, are proclaimed courageously by the deacon. The Gospels frequently portray Jesus as forgiving sinners and touching the outcast. He heals the sick and feeds the hungry and he is always deeply concerned with issues of justice.

The prayer of the faithful proclaimed by the deacon ties the needs of the world with the action of the Eucharist. The intercessions should not simply ask God to cure all ills and cast out all evil,

but they should ask God to strengthen Church and world leaders as well as local Church members to be God's hands and eyes and prophetic voice in the world.

As the United States Bishop's document on Permanent Deacons states: "He has a special responsibility to identify to the Church those who are in need and particularly those who are without power or voice at the margin's of our society...in the Church, he is to speak about the needy and to inspire and mobilize the whole community's response." (Permanent Deacons #37)

It is the task of the deacon to keep the prayer life of the Church from becoming hollow or hypocritical. He is to make certain that the Eucharist bears fruit in the world by setting an example of service and leading others in selfless acts of charity in the world.

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