

Concerning Eucharistic Adoration, Exposition & Benediction

Diocese of St. Petersburg, Florida

◆ Historical Background

The first evidence of reserving a portion of the Eucharist appears in the second century in response to a pastoral need: bringing the Eucharist to those who were not present for the Sunday celebration (St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 67.3-5). By the third century, Christians were carrying a portion of the consecrated bread home in little boxes (*arcae*) and reserving it there in a cupboard or closet to receive during the week, because they only celebrated the Eucharist on Sunday at this time (Cyprian of Carthage, d 258).

Eucharistic reservation and adoration as we know it today began in the thirteenth century. At this time, participation in communion by the laity was primarily “visual,” that is, seeing the elevated host was the high point of the Mass. They rarely received communion. Among the reasons for this was a general feeling of unworthiness, the use of a language (Latin) that was foreign to them, a failure to appreciate the Eucharist as a shared meal, the assuming of the laity’s roles by the clergy, and a lost connection to the Church’s roots. By the fourteenth century, various forms of eucharistic devotions outside Mass developed for the laity’s participation, such as pilgrimages, processions, and Forty Hours.

This is the context in which the Church found itself before the Second Vatican Council. The focus of eucharistic theology—codified by the Council of Trent in reaction to the Reformation—was mainly on the bread and wine becoming the body and blood of the Lord. Private and silent adoration of the Lord truly present in the tabernacle or on the altar was for all practical purposes the laity’s understanding of and participation in eucharistic worship.

Following the developments of the Liturgical Movement in the early twentieth century, the Second Vatican Council recovered the Church’s liturgical roots and with it its eucharistic theology. In the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (CSL)*, the Council Fathers stated: “The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed. At the same time it is the fount from which all the Church’s power flows” (*CSL*, no.10). The *Constitution* also recovered the early Church’s understanding of the multiple presence of Christ in the liturgy: in the minister, the word proclaimed, the eucharist and other sacraments, and in the participation of the faithful (*CSL*, no. 7).

Eucharistic worship consists in our active participation in the Mass, culminating in holy communion and our public and private adoration of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Both are distinct forms of worship. Therefore, those who prepare eucharistic devotions need to be careful that everything within them clearly brings out the meaning of eucharistic worship in its correlation with the Mass, the source and culmination of the whole Christian life (*Order of Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist [OSEHE]*, nos. 4 and 7). Visiting the Blessed Sacrament should draw the faithful deeper into the Paschal Mystery and strengthen their desire to lead lives as sharers in the death and resurrection of the Lord. Thus they will foster the right dispositions that enable them to celebrate the Mass and receive frequently the bread given to us by the Father (*Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass [HCWEOM]*, no 80).

◆ Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament

Prayer before the Blessed Sacrament has long been encouraged by the Church. The Church teaches that prayer is essential for Christian spirituality and calls us to set aside time for private prayer. Therefore, the Church asserts that prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament is a privileged time, a time when we speak to and respond to the prompting of the eucharistic Lord in our hearts. Just as our Lord needed time to be alone in prayer, so too, do we. Pope Paul VI emphasized this by saying, “visiting the eucharistic Lord is a proof of gratitude, a pledge of love, a service of adoration owed to the Lord present there” (*Mysterium Fidei*, no. 66).

Important as private prayer is, it should always lead the individual back to the Lord who is present in the celebration of the Eucharist and in the midst of his people. Christ present in the Eucharist presupposes his presence in the assembly gathered for common prayer, his presence in the word, his presence in the minister, and his presence in the sharing of the eucharistic bread and cup. Therefore, private devotion and adoration of the reserved Blessed Sacrament should lead the faithful to a fuller appreciation of the communal dimension of the Mass.

Parishes should offer a sound catechesis on the theology of the Eucharist (see list of resources) and opportunities for the faithful to gather for prayer before the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle. It is the general understanding of the Church that the adoration of the Eucharist reserved in the tabernacle is normative and sufficient. In the history of the Church, this has been the primary way eucharistic adoration has occurred because it is a devotional practice of the individual; therefore, it needed no specific guidelines. By opening our churches during the day (if there is no chapel of reservation) parishes create a climate for the faithful to come as individuals or as a group to pray for personal/world needs, to grow closer to the Lord, and to grow in faith, hope and love.

◆ Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, in contrast to adoration, refers to the public display of the Blessed Sacrament in either a monstrance or a ciborium. It is part of a liturgical rite, therefore, the directives for exposition are explicit and outlined in *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* (*HCWEOM*, nos. 82-100), in liturgical directives, and in instructions from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. The clear intention of these documents is that exposition has a beginning and an end. By its very nature, it is not perpetual. According to *HCWEOM*, no.95, exposition should involve music, reading(s) from sacred Scripture, preaching, intercessory prayer, time for private prayer/adoration, and conclude with a special blessing of the faithful.

HCWEOM permits and encourages that the solemn exposition of the Blessed Sacrament take place in churches or oratories where the Eucharist is regularly reserved. There are two allowances for such expositions described below.

1. Annual Solemn Exposition

The solemn exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for an extended period (one or more days) should take place “once a year” (*HCWEOM*, no. 86). Such an annual event allows a parish community the opportunity to meditate more deeply on the mystery of the Eucharist, to adore the Lord, and to grow in holiness in their relationship with the Lord and as a community. It also can draw the

faithful into that full, conscious and active participation called for in the liturgy (*CSL*, no. 14). Parishes could connect these annual celebrations to the solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ or perhaps to the anniversary of the parish's founding. In this way, the devotion would take into account the liturgical season, be in accord with the liturgy, and lead the people back to the liturgy (*HCWEOM*, no. 79).

Since exposition is a rite of the church, this extended period is to include readings from sacred Scripture, hymns, preaching, intercessory prayer, and periods of silent prayer. Celebrating portions of the Liturgy of the Hours during this time is also appropriate and encouraged. *The Order for the Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist (OSEHE)* [Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993, ISBN 0-8146-2039-6] was published specifically as a collection of rites and texts to be used during annual solemn exposition.

Careful preparation should be part of this type of annual solemn exposition. According to the liturgical norms, exposition of this kind may take place only if the parish ensures the participation of a reasonable number of the faithful, the local Ordinary consents, and they follow the established norms (*Eucharisticum Mysterium [EM]*, no. 63; *HCWEOM*, no. 86).

During annual solemn exposition, the celebration of Mass in the body of the church is prohibited. If exposition is occurring in a chapel separate from the main body of the church, Mass may take place in the church; however, at least some of the faithful must remain in adoration. The exposed Blessed Sacrament **must never** be left alone (*EM*, nos. 63 & 65; *HCWEOM*, no. 90; *CODE OF CANON LAW*, no. 942).

2. Brief Periods of Exposition

The Church gives allowance for briefer periods of exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, perhaps monthly or weekly for a fixed period of time. Because the Eucharist is being exposed in a monstrance or ciborium, it is a ritual of the Church and the directives of *HCWEOM* (nos. 93-100) and the liturgical norms established by the Church are to be strictly followed.

Brief periods of exposition should include music, Scripture, a brief preaching, intercessory prayer, liturgical ministers (at least a musician and a leader), and time for silent prayer. By including these, parishes will clearly link this time of exposition with the celebration of the Eucharist at Mass. Scheduling brief periods of exposition on a monthly or weekly basis also brings together a greater number of adorers at fixed hours, rather than spreading out individuals over different hours of the day. *Exposition for the sake of only giving benediction is prohibited* (*EM*, no. 66; *HCWEOM*, no. 89).

◆ Perpetual Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

The issue of “perpetual” exposition (i.e., 365 days, 24 hours a day) of the Eucharist is being advocated by some within the Church. Because perpetual exposition is a devotional practice of a religious community or a pious association that observes this according to their constitution, it should normally take place in a chapel of that religious community or association (Congregation for Divine Worship, July 1995). Neither of these exist in the Diocese of St. Petersburg. The general

understanding of the Church is that this type of exposition is not to be the normal and continuous pattern in the parish. Parishes seeking dispensation from this rule must petition the Bishop and show good reason for its need. They also will need to show that they have attended to the primary form of Eucharistic activity—Sunday Eucharist (see the next paragraph).

◆ Conclusion

Although exposition of the Blessed Sacrament may help foster devotion to Christ's presence in the Eucharist, a parish's first priority is well-planned and well-celebrated Masses. Parishes seeking to inaugurate or restore eucharistic devotions should reflect on their practices during the communion rite and their commitment of time and money (stewardship) to social services. Are they as respectful and reverent toward Christ's presence in the gathered Body, the Church, as they are to the presence of Christ in the Sacrament? Is the fuller expression of the Eucharist under the forms of bread and wine being offered to the faithful at all Masses? Does the eucharistic bread look like bread? Does the parish carefully prepare enough communion for the gathered assembly instead of routinely going to the tabernacle? Does the eucharistic procession take its own time or is the focus to try to get through the communion rite as efficiently and expediently as possible? Do the eucharistic ministers reflect the parish, i.e., inclusive of age, ethnicity, and gender? Have the eucharistic ministers been properly trained and is their formation ongoing? Is the Eucharist being brought to members of the parish who cannot gather on Sunday because of sickness or advanced age? When these issues have been addressed, then the deeper understanding of communion that Christ intended in the Eucharist will be achieved.

The celebration of the Eucharist in the sacrifice of the Mass is the true origin and purpose of the adoration shown to the Eucharist outside Mass (*HCWEOM*, no. 2). The reasons for reserving the Eucharist are twofold. First, through sacramental communion, to nourish and unite with the body of Christ those who are unable to participate in the Mass, especially the sick and the aged. Second, it is for prayer and devotion, which should lead the individual back to the eucharistic celebration with renewed faith, hope, and love. Respecting the nature of these two aspects of the Eucharist and the place for each illustrates our understanding and respect for the fullness of the eucharistic mystery.

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Resources

- *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, Instruction by the Sacred Congregation for Rites, DOCUMENTS ON THE LITURGY: 1963-1979, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982.
- *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*, New York: Catholic Book Publishing, Co., 1976.
- *Pastoral Liturgy Series #2: Thirty-One Questions on Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament*, Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Publishing, 2004.
- *Order for the Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist-Ministers Edition*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993.

Bulletin Inserts on the Eucharist (Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions)

- *Give Thanks and Praise: A Popular Explanation of the Mass*
- *This Saving Cup*
- *The Blessed Sacrament: Past and Current Practices*

For a price list or to order FDLC materials contact:
FDLC, 415 Michigan Avenue, N.E., Suite 70, Washington, D.C. 20017
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Web site: www.fdlc.org

The Rite of Eucharistic Exposition and Benediction

I. EXPOSITION (HCWEOM, no. 93)

✦ **Hymn** *After the people have assembled, a song relating to the liturgical season or the mystery of the Eucharist is sung while the minister goes to the altar and genuflects.*

The minister removes the Luna from the tabernacle and puts it in the monstrance or leaves it in the ciborium, which is then placed on the altar.

✦ **Incense** *The minister incenses the Blessed Sacrament.*

II. ADORATION (HCWEOM, nos. 95 & 96)

*The current rubrics prescribe “prayers, songs, and readings to direct the attention of the faithful to the worship of Christ the Lord” (EM, no. 62; HCWEOM, no. 94; Ceremonial of Bishops, no. 1111). Also, recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours, especially the primary hours, may take place. The exact order is left up to local determination, however, parishes might consider a **Liturgy of the Word format**, i.e., reading, response, reading, preaching, intercessory prayer, silent prayer.*

Scripture should be proclaimed from the ambo used for readings at Mass.

The celebrant should normally be at the presidential chair during this time.

A homily is explicitly mentioned along with periods of silence (EM, no. 62; HCWEOM, no. 95; CB, no. 1111)

III. BENEDICTION (HCWEOM, nos. 97-99)

✦ **Hymn** *The minister returns to the altar as a eucharistic hymn is sung.*

✦ **Incense** *The minister genuflects, kneels and incenses the Blessed Sacrament.*

✦ **Prayer** *The minister stands, faces the people and says (sings) a prayer from the seven options offered (see HCWEOM, no. 98).*

✦ **Benediction** *A priest or deacon puts on a humeral veil, genuflects, and takes the monstrance or ciborium. In silence, he makes the sign of the cross over those assembled.*

IV. REPOSITION (HCWEOM, no. 100)

The Blessed Sacrament is immediately replaced in the tabernacle. The minister genuflects and departs.

✦ **Hymn** *The people may sing an “acclamation” or other hymn and then depart.*