



# Guidelines for the Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass

Archdiocese of New York

Prepared by the  
Office of Liturgy

The Eucharist is a priceless treasure: by not only celebrating it but also by praying before it outside of Mass, we are enabled to make contact with the very wellspring of grace.... It is pleasant to spend time with [Jesus], to lie close to his breast like the Beloved Disciple (*cf.* Jn 13:25) and to feel the infinite love present in his heart.

-Pope Saint John Paul II,  
*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 25

## Introduction

The following guidelines provide a summary of the ecclesial documentation concerning the worship of the Eucharist outside of Mass. They are intended to serve as an aid to clergy and others within the Archdiocese of New York who are entrusted with fostering the faithful's devotion to the Blessed Sacrament through eucharistic adoration, both individually and in community. Questions regarding these guidelines may be directed to the Office of Liturgy.

## Historical Background



The practice of reserving the Eucharist is an ancient observance which has its origins in the earliest centuries of the Church's history. The first extant description of reserving the Eucharist in order to bring Holy Communion to the sick is recorded in Saint Justin Martyr's *First Apology* (c. 155-157). In the following century, Cyprian of Carthage described how Christians would bring the Eucharist to their homes to receive it during the week, since the celebration of the Eucharist took place only on Sundays at this point in Christian history.<sup>1</sup> In a tradition beginning in the city of Rome, the Eucharist was sometimes reserved and then added to the Precious Blood during a later Mass celebrated in another location as a way of symbolically expressing the communion between parishes and their bishop or between various bishops. At other times, the reserved Sacrament from one Mass was added to the Precious Blood at a later Mass to signify the

unity of all eucharistic celebrations in Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross.<sup>2</sup> In order to make the Eucharist available for these various purposes, the Blessed Sacrament was regularly reserved in tabernacles from the fourth century onward.

The common practice of praying before the reserved Eucharist began roughly in the eleventh and twelfth centuries as a consequence of the writings of certain Scholastic theologians on the subject of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. During this period, the dogma of transubstantiation, which is listed among the articles of faith,<sup>3</sup> was first articulated.

Transubstantiation is the term used by the Church to describe "the way in which Christ

<sup>1</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, *De lapsis*, 26.

<sup>2</sup> Aside from reserving the Eucharist to bring Holy Communion to the sick, the ancient practices described here are no longer observed. Nevertheless, they formed a pathway which has led to today's expressions of devotion to the Eucharist.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Blessed Paul VI, *Mysterium fidei*, 10, 54.

becomes present in [the Holy Eucharist] through the conversion of the whole substance of the bread into His body and of the whole substance of the wine into His blood.”<sup>4</sup> This teaching was formally defined by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and confirmed by the Council of Trent in 1551. At the time, the Council Fathers of Trent also reiterated the teaching of the Council of Constance (1415) concerning the doctrine of concomitance, which states that “Christ is present whole and entire in each of the [Eucharistic] species and whole and entire in each of their parts, in such a way that the breaking of the bread does not divide Christ.”<sup>5</sup>

As the faithful during the late Middle Ages meditated on the nature of Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist, practices such as gazing upon the Eucharist at the time of the elevation of the host and chalice after the consecration at Mass, adoring the exposed Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance outside of Mass, and carrying the Eucharist in procession began to develop. At this time and during the centuries which followed, these rites were considered to be primarily devotional in nature, meaning that they were regarded as extensions of the Church's liturgical celebration of the Mass.<sup>6</sup>

More recently, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council reaffirmed the traditional teaching of the Church concerning the Real Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. They taught:

At the Last Supper, on the night when He was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the Sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of His Death and Resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is eaten, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.<sup>7</sup>

During the Council, Pope Blessed Paul VI expressed his hope that the reform and restoration of the Mass called for by the Conciliar Fathers would “produce abundant fruits in the form of Eucharistic devotion, so that the Holy Church may, with this salvific sign of piety raised on high, make daily progress toward the full achievement of unity.”<sup>8</sup> In 1967, the Sacred Congregation of Rites similarly emphasized the relationship between adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and the celebration of the Mass, indicating that “when the faithful adore Christ present in the sacrament, they should remember that this presence derives from the sacrifice and is directed toward both sacramental and spiritual Communion.”<sup>9</sup> The intimate connection

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<sup>4</sup> *Mysterium fidei*, 46.

<sup>5</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1377. Cf. Council of Trent, *DS*, 1641.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, 130-135.

<sup>7</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 47.

<sup>8</sup> *Mysterium fidei*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Eucharisticum mysterium*, 50.

between Eucharistic adoration and the celebration of Mass was more fully articulated and developed in *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* (1973). This document presents the worship of the Eucharist outside of Mass within the context of the official liturgical rites of the Church, noting that the Eucharist is “reserved after Mass to extend the grace of the sacrifice” of the Eucharistic celebration.<sup>10</sup> This ritual book continues to guide the Church in her liturgical celebrations of offering worship to the Eucharist outside of Mass.

### *Purposes of Eucharistic Worship Outside of Mass*

The popes of our time have consistently encouraged the practice of worshipping the Eucharist outside of Mass. For example, in his annual Holy Thursday letter to priests in 1980, Pope Saint John Paul II wrote that “the Church and the world have great need of Eucharistic adoration. Jesus waits for us in this sacrament of love. Let us be generous with our time in going to meet Him in adoration and contemplation full of faith. And let us be ready to make reparation for the great faults and crimes of the world. May our adoration never cease.”<sup>11</sup> In his 2005 address to the Roman Curia, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI similarly noted the value of adoring the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass, saying, “only in adoration can a profound and genuine reception mature. And it is precisely this personal encounter with the Lord that then strengthens the social mission contained in the Eucharist, which seeks to break down not only the walls that separate the Lord and ourselves, but also and especially the walls that separate us from one another.”<sup>12</sup> More recently, Pope Francis has also reflected on how “one cannot know the Lord without the habit of adoring, of adoring in silence.”<sup>13</sup>

These papal statements and the historical development of Eucharistic adoration indicate that there are three purposes for the worship of the Eucharist outside of Mass:

- “to acknowledge Christ's marvelous presence in the sacrament;”
- to lead to a fuller participation in the celebration of the Mass, culminating in the reception of Holy Communion; and,
- to encourage and foster “worship which is due to Christ in spirit and truth.”<sup>14</sup>

### *Eucharistic Adoration and Exposition*

The worship and adoration of the Eucharist outside of Mass most often takes place when the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the tabernacle. These times of private adoration and prayer

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<sup>10</sup> *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* [HCWEOM], 4.

<sup>11</sup> Pope Saint John Paul II, *Dominicae cenae: Letter to Priests, Holy Thursday* (1980).

<sup>12</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Roman Curia (22 December 2005), AAS 98 (2006): 45.

<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, Homily at Santa Marta Residence (20 October 2016).

<sup>14</sup> HCWEOM, 82.

offer the faithful a privileged opportunity to “easily, fruitfully, and constantly honor the Lord, present in the sacrament, through personal worship.”<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the private adoration of the Eucharist in the tabernacle, the Blessed Sacrament may be exposed in a monstrance or ciborium for display to the faithful. The exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is a public liturgical rite which is celebrated by the Church community. As such, the times of exposition should be scheduled when a sufficient number of the faithful can be present to pray before the exposed Eucharist. The Blessed Sacrament should never be exposed for the purposes of private devotion.<sup>16</sup>

### *General Regulations for Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament*

The Church has established the following norms for the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament:

1. A single genuflection is made in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, whether reserved in the tabernacle or exposed for public adoration.<sup>17</sup>
2. When the Blessed Sacrament is exposed in a monstrance, four to six candles are lit and incense is to be used. When the Blessed Sacrament is exposed in a ciborium, at least two candles are lit and incense may optionally be used.<sup>18</sup>
3. Pastors should arrange annually for the solemn exposition and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. This may take place within the context of a “Forty Hours” devotion or for some other shorter period.<sup>19</sup>
4. Parishes may also schedule briefer periods of exposition more often throughout the year; however, it is prohibited to expose the Blessed Sacrament only for the purpose of giving benediction.<sup>20</sup>

### *The Minister of Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament*

A bishop, priest, or deacon is the ordinary minister for the exposition of the Eucharist.<sup>21</sup> These ministers should vest in an alb or cassock and surplice, with a stole. A white cope and humeral veil should be worn at the time of initial exposition and the concluding benediction

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<sup>15</sup> HCWEOM, 9.

<sup>16</sup> HCWEOM, 86 and CIC, 942.

<sup>17</sup> HCWEOM, 84.

<sup>18</sup> HCWEOM, 85.

<sup>19</sup> HCWEOM, 86.

<sup>20</sup> HCWEOM, 89.

<sup>21</sup> HCWEOM, 91.

when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed in a monstrance. In the case of exposition in a ciborium, a humeral veil should be worn. These ministers should bless those present with the Blessed Sacrament at the conclusion of a period of Eucharistic exposition.

In the absence of an ordinary minister, an instituted acolyte, an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, or a member of a religious community or lay association dedicated to eucharistic adoration and who has received approval from the local Ordinary may open the tabernacle and, if appropriate, place the ciborium on the altar or the host in the monstrance.<sup>22</sup> At the conclusion of the period of adoration, these persons should replace the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle without blessing those present with the Eucharist. Acolytes should vest in an alb or cassock and surplice. No special vesture is required of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion or others who are not ordinary ministers when exposing the Blessed Sacrament.

### *Rites and Prayers - General Considerations*

The rites of Exposition and Benediction of the Eucharist are described in *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* and the US Bishops' *Order for the Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist*.<sup>23</sup> Both of these resources indicate that, during the time of exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, there should be prayers, songs, and readings to assist the faithful in worshipping Christ present in the Eucharist. As well, periods of silence should be observed in order to foster personal prayer.

The *Liturgy of the Hours* may be celebrated in the presence of the exposed Blessed Sacrament. In such cases, and when the hour celebrated corresponds with the conclusion of the time of exposition, the concluding prayer of the hour may be omitted and replaced by the rite of benediction.

The Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments has stated that the rosary, as “a prayer inspired by the Gospel and centered on the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption, ‘should be considered a prayer of deep Christological orientation,’ and may rightly be counted among the prayers designed to ‘direct the attention of the faithful to the worship of Christ the Lord’”<sup>24</sup> within the context of adoration of the exposed Blessed Sacrament.

The USCCB's Secretariat of Divine Worship has indicated that the Stations of the Cross, however, should not be recited during the time of Eucharistic exposition, as the movement

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Order for the Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist*, Various publishers, 1992.

<sup>24</sup> Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, Prot no. 2287/96/L (1 January 1998).



around the church which typically accompanies the praying of this devotion does not serve to foster the adoration of Christ in the exposed Blessed Sacrament.<sup>25</sup>

### *Rite of Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament*

The Rite of Exposition and Benediction will typically take place in the following manner:

The server leads the celebrant into the sanctuary, where both will genuflect if the Blessed Sacrament is reposed in a tabernacle in the sanctuary. As the celebrant retrieves the Blessed Sacrament from the tabernacle wearing the humeral veil, the server and those present kneel down. The celebrant places the Blessed Sacrament into the monstrance or, in the case of a ciborium, directly on the altar, covered by a corporal. The celebrant returns to the front of the sanctuary, and he prepares the incense with the assistance of the server as the hymn *O Salutaris Hostia* or another appropriate Eucharistic hymn is sung. At the second verse of the hymn, the celebrant incenses the Blessed Sacrament with three double swings of the thurible.<sup>26</sup> After a suitable period of silence, the celebrant and server rise, genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament and return to the sacristy.

At the time for benediction, the celebrant and server return to the center of the sanctuary, genuflect, and kneel down as *Tantum Ergo* or another appropriate Eucharistic hymn is sung. During this time, the incense is prepared and, at the beginning of the second verse of the hymn, the celebrant again incenses the Blessed Sacrament with three double swings of the thurible. After the incensation, the celebrant recites the Eucharistic versicle with the people responding (*i.e.*, “You have given them bread from heaven. Containing in itself all delight”). Standing, the celebrant says or sings “Let us pray” and proclaims the prayer “Lord Jesus Christ, you gave yourself. . . .” The celebrant then receives the humeral veil and approaches the altar. Genuflecting before the Blessed Sacrament, the celebrant then slowly and reverently makes a Sign of the Cross with the Blessed Sacrament over those gathered in silence, during which time the server incenses the Blessed Sacrament as described above. Having placed the Blessed Sacrament on the altar and returning to the front of the sanctuary, the celebrant kneels and leads those gathered in reciting the Divine Praises. Additional prayers, such as “May the heart of Jesus. . . .” may be said at this time. The celebrant then rises, genuflects before the Blessed Sacrament on the altar and reposes the Eucharist in the tabernacle, after which time all gathered may sing a hymn of thanksgiving, such as “Holy God, We Praise Thy Name.”

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<sup>25</sup> USCCB, “Devotions and Eucharistic Adoration,” <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/adoration/devotions-and-eucharistic-adoration.cfm>, accessed 11 November 2017.

<sup>26</sup> See the commentary of the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship in: *Notitiae* 14 (1978): 301-302, n.2.

### *Eucharistic Exposition and the Celebration of Mass*

It is prohibited to celebrate Mass in the presence of the exposed Blessed Sacrament.<sup>27</sup> However, when the Eucharist is exposed for public veneration following Mass, a host that has been consecrated at that same Mass should be used for this purpose. The host may be exposed in the monstrance or a ciborium on the altar, which is covered with a corporal. The celebrant should pray the Prayer After Communion at the end of Mass and then incense the Blessed Sacrament, omitting the final blessing and dismissal. A period of Eucharistic exposition then follows, concluding with benediction.

### *Eucharistic Processions*

The tradition of carrying the Eucharist in procession, especially on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (*Corpus Christi*) is encouraged by the Church's liturgical books.<sup>28</sup> The purpose of such processions through the streets is to give public witness to the faith of the Christian people and to manifest their devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, processions solely within the body of a church are no longer permitted, and processions with the Blessed Sacrament should usually go from one church to another. However, if necessary, a procession may return to the same church from where it began.<sup>30</sup>

It is for the local Ordinary to decide on the advisability of such processions and approve a place and plan that will ensure that these movements are carried out with decorum and reverence.<sup>31</sup> As well, suitable arrangements should be made with public authorities and law enforcement officials in order to provide for the safety of those who will participate in processions.

Ideally, the Mass of the day will immediately precede a Eucharistic procession. Following the distribution of Holy Communion, a monstrance is prepared and placed on the altar. The Prayer after Communion is offered, the Sacrament is incensed, and the procession then begins. Eucharistic songs and hymns which are easily sung and memorized should be led by a choir during the procession. While not required, the traditional custom of stopping at stations in order to proclaim the Word of God and give a Eucharistic blessing may take place.<sup>32</sup> A canopy or baldachin held over the Blessed Sacrament may also optionally be used. At the

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<sup>27</sup> HCWEOM, 83.

<sup>28</sup> See: HCWEOM, 101-104; *Roman Missal*, Mass formulary for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of the Lord (*Corpus Christi*); *Ceremonial of Bishops*, 1095.

<sup>29</sup> HCWEOM, 101.

<sup>30</sup> HCWEOM, 107; Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, *Notitiae* 11 (1975): 64.

<sup>31</sup> *Eucharisticum mysterium*, 39; HCWEOM, 72.

<sup>32</sup> HCWEOM, 104.



conclusion of the procession, benediction with the Blessed Sacrament should be given in the church where the procession ends. The Blessed Sacrament is then reposed.

The *Ceremonial of Bishops* gives the following order for Eucharistic processions:

- Crossbearer accompanied by candlebearers
- Clergy wearing copes or vestments for Mass
- Deacon of the Mass
- Thurifer with burning incense
- Priest carrying the Blessed Sacrament [walking under a canopy if it is used] and accompanied by torchbearers
- Other members of the congregation [optionally carrying lighted candles]
- Persons holding suitable banners
- Musical instruments<sup>33</sup>

### *Eucharistic Exposition and Prayer Services for Healing*

It should be noted that the practice of processing through the church with the exposed Blessed Sacrament at prayer services for healing in order that the faithful might touch the humeral veil of the celebrant in imitation of the hemorrhaging woman who touched the hem of Christ's garment in the Gospels is not envisioned by the Church's liturgical books. Pastors should remind sick members of their congregation that the reception of Holy Communion is the preeminent way for them to enter into communion with Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. As well, those who suffer from serious illness should be encouraged to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Lastly, the sick who are able may be invited to regularly spend time with the Lord in prayer during Eucharistic exposition and be present for benediction with the Blessed Sacrament.

### *Perpetual Adoration or Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament*

The document *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* indicates that some religious communities and other groups, such as pious associations of the laity, have the practice of adoring the Blessed Sacrament perpetually or for extended periods of time.<sup>34</sup> In the case of adoring the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle, no special permission is needed for such groups to engage in these times of prayer. If the Blessed Sacrament is to be exposed in a ciborium or monstrance either perpetually or for extended periods of time, the permission of the local Ordinary is required.

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<sup>33</sup> *Ceremonial of Bishops*, 391.

<sup>34</sup> *HCWEOM*, 90.

Perpetual or extended times of exposition of the Blessed Sacrament may take place at certain days and times of the week as per the practice of a religious community or parish group. However, exposition may not take place during the Easter Triduum.<sup>35</sup>

When permission has been given for perpetual exposition of the Blessed Sacrament to take place in a parish church, this should normally occur in a chapel that is set apart and distinct from the body of the church in order to allow for liturgical services and other daily activities to take place in the church without interruption.

During the time of exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, at least two persons must be present. At no time should the Blessed Sacrament be exposed without anyone present.<sup>36</sup>

The exposition of the Blessed Sacrament behind a glass window in a tabernacle is not permitted.<sup>37</sup> As well, the use of drapes or doors to separate the exposed Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance from a chapel for short periods of time or when no one will be present in the chapel does not satisfy the requirement to repose the Blessed Sacrament in a tabernacle under lock and key.<sup>38</sup>

### *Special Circumstances and Additional Considerations*

Additional questions may arise regarding the practices and devotions associated with the worship of the Eucharist outside of Mass. These may be referred to the archdiocesan Office of Liturgy.

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<sup>35</sup> *Responsum ad dubium* received by the US Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy (July 1995).

<sup>36</sup> Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 138.

<sup>37</sup> *HCWEOM*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> See: Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Notitiae* 42 (2006): 493-504.