



Seven Questions on the Distribution of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds

1. Why did the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council recommend the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds?

“The Council’s decision [in 1963] to restore Holy Communion under both kinds at the bishop’s discretion took expression in the first edition of the *Missale Romanum* and enjoys an even more generous application in the third typical edition of the *Missale Romanum*: ‘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. Moreover there is a clearer expression of that will by which the new and everlasting covenant is ratified in the blood of the Lord and of the relationship of the Eucharistic banquet to the eschatological banquet in the Father’s kingdom.’”¹

“From the first days of the Church’s celebration of the Eucharist, Holy Communion consisted of the reception of both species in fulfillment of the Lord’s command to ‘take and eat . . . take and drink.’ The distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful under both kinds was thus the norm for more than a millennium of Catholic liturgical practice.”² “The practice of Holy Communion under both kinds at Mass continued until the late eleventh century, when the custom of distributing the Eucharist to the faithful under the form of bread alone began to grow. By the twelfth century theologians such as Peter Cantor speak of Communion under one kind as a ‘custom’ of the Church. This practice spread until the Council of Constance in 1415 decreed that Holy Communion under the form of bread alone would be distributed to the faithful.”³

2. What preparation of the faithful is required before the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds?

“For the faithful who take part in the rite or are present at it, pastors should take care to call to mind as appropriately as possible Catholic teaching according to the Council of Trent on the manner of Communion. Above all they should instruct the Christian faithful that, according to Catholic faith, Christ, whole and entire, as well as the true Sacrament are received under one kind only; that, therefore, as far as the effects are concerned, those who receive in this manner are not deprived of any grace necessary for salvation.”⁴

3. What resources can assist in this preparation?

*Norms for the Distribution of Holy Communion under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America*⁵ were approved by the bishops of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and confirmed by the Holy See in 2002. Part I of these Norms (*Holy Communion: The Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus*) provides a summary of the Church’s teaching on Holy Communion which can aid in the preparation of ministers and faithful in preparing to receive Holy Communion under Both Kinds. Likewise, the USCCB pamphlet *Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist*⁶ may be helpful in such formation. Both texts are available online in English and Spanish or from USCCB Publishing.⁷

4. When Holy Communion is distributed under both kinds, what happens to what remains of the Precious Blood?

“When more of the Precious Blood remains than was necessary for Communion, and if not consumed by the bishop or priest celebrant, the deacon immediately and reverently consumes at the altar all of the Blood of Christ which remains; he may be assisted, if needs dictate, by other deacons and priests. When there are extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, they may consume what remains of the Precious Blood from their chalice of distribution with permission of the diocesan bishop.”⁸

5. Who then purifies the sacred vessels?

As ordinary ministers of Holy Communion, the priest and the deacon purify the sacred vessels. The instituted acolyte, by reason of his office, “helps the priest or deacon to purify and arrange the sacred vessels.”⁹ In the dioceses of the United States of America, the ministry of instituted acolyte, which is open only to men, is primarily made up of those preparing to receive Holy Orders.¹⁰

6. May an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion assist in the purification of sacred vessels?

In accord with the Holy Father’s recent decision, as reported in Cardinal Arinze’s letter of October 12, 2006 (Prot. no. 468/05/L), an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may not assist in the purification of sacred vessels. This extraordinary ministry

was created exclusively for those instances where there are not enough ordinary ministers to distribute Holy Communion, due to the consummate importance of ensuring that the faithful have the opportunity to receive Holy Communion at Mass, even when it is distributed under both species (cf. RS, no. 102).

7. What about those instances where there are many chalices and only one priest to purify them?

When there are insufficient priests, deacons, or instituted acolytes to purify the additional chalices during Mass, the purification may take place immediately after the Mass has concluded. If such purification by ordinary ministers proves pastorally problematic, consideration should be given to distribution of Holy Communion by intinction or to the distribution of Holy Communion under the form of consecrated bread alone.¹¹ Priests should also keep in mind potential health risks associated with intinction, especially in the coming flu season.

- 1 *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds for the Dioceses of the United States of America* (Norms), no. 20, citing *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM), no. 281.
- 2 *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC), no. 55, cf. Norms, no. 17.
- 3 Norms, no. 18.
- 4 GIRM, no. 281; cf. *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (RS), no. 100.
- 5 Available from http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/current/norms.shtml#N_30_#N_30_
- 6 Available from <http://www.usccbpublishing.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=596>
- 7 Available from <http://www.usccbpublishing.com>
- 8 Norms, no. 52.
- 9 GIRM, no. 192.
- 10 Cf. GIRM, no. 98, and nos. 187-193.
- 11 Cf. *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, no. 102.

The document *Seven Questions on the Distribution of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds* was developed by the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

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