



EUCCHARISTIC EXPOSITION: APPROPRIATE DEVOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

A SERVICE OF CATHOLICS UNITED FOR THE FAITH

ISSUE

What devotional activities are appropriate during Eucharistic exposition?

RESPONSE

Any devotional activity, whether communal or private, during Eucharistic exposition should direct the faithful to the worship of Christ, present in the Blessed Sacrament. The Church particularly encourages the reading of the Scriptures and silent prayer. The singing of hymns, a brief homily by a priest or deacon, the praying of the Liturgy of the Hours, and the recitation of the Rosary are also included in those activities that appropriately take place during Eucharistic exposition.

DISCUSSION

From First Friday devotions to perpetual exposition, many parishes are adopting and promoting adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. As parish participation in Eucharistic adoration with exposition increases, the question arises: What activities are appropriate during Eucharistic exposition? Particularly, what public devotions or communal prayer may take place during exposition?

A number of Church documents indicate the types of activities that the Church envisions for Eucharistic exposition. They center on the principle that *Jesus is the direct object of adoration during exposition*. “During the exposition everything should be so arranged that the faithful can devote themselves attentively in prayer to Christ our Lord” (Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery, *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, no. 62).

The Church consistently gives the reading of the Scriptures first place among those activities that might take place during adoration. They “afford an unrivalled source of prayer,” directing us to the worship of Christ (*Directory on Popular Piety and the*

Liturgy, no. 165). The Church also holds a preference for silent prayer and reflection: “It is necessary that there should be periods of silence at suitable times” (*Eucharisticum Mysterium*, no. 62).

The Congregation for Divine Worship’s 2001 *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* summarizes what is provided in other Church documents. In addition to reading the Scriptures,

suitable hymns and canticles based on those of the Liturgy of the Hours and the liturgical seasons could also be encouraged, as well as periods of silent prayer and reflection. Gradually, the faithful should be encouraged not to do other devotional exercises during exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Given the close relationship between Christ and Our Lady, the rosary can always be of assistance in giving prayer a Christological orientation, since it contains meditation of the Incarnation and the Redemption. (no. 165)

The Rite of Eucharistic Exposition and Benediction (which particularly applies to non-perpetual periods of exposition) likewise instructs: “There should be prayers, songs, and readings to direct the attention of the faithful to the worship of Christ the Lord.” Following the reading of Scripture, the priest or deacon might give “a homily or brief exhortations to develop a better understanding of the Eucharistic mystery.” The Rite also notes the importance of periods of “religious silence.” All of these activities foster the primary end or purpose for which exposition takes place—to worship, adore, and pray to Our Lord.

Not only should prayerful adoration be promoted, but those things which detract from adoration should be avoided: “In the surroundings of exposition, anything must be carefully avoided that could in any way obscure Christ’s intention of instituting the Holy Eucharist above all in order to be near us to feed, to heal, and to comfort us” (*Eucharisticum Mysterium*, no. 60).

Adoration Devotionals

In response to a question about devotional activities during exposition, the Sacred Congregation of Rites again highlights the fact that prayer before the Blessed Sacrament is to be centered on Christ truly present in the Sacrament. The Congregation declares: "Other devotions, although good and commendable, take attention away to a different object and should therefore be assigned to another time, either before or after exposition of the Blessed Sacrament" (*Notitiae* 4 [1968], no.110).

While the Church's guidelines do not explicitly forbid the practice of specific devotions, they do make clear that the Real Presence of Christ in the

Blessed Sacrament must be the focus of both private and communal prayer during Eucharistic exposition. And while there is no explicit prohibition against extra activities taking place in a church, oratory, or chapel during adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, any such activities should be arranged with respect to the adoration of Christ. At the very least, those who are present in adoration should not be subject to unnecessary distractions. Further, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is never to be the "backdrop" for other activities. Eucharistic exposition is a time of close communion with Our Lord. It is towards Christ, present in the Eucharist, that our attention should be directed.

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