



# PROPER HANDLING OF EUCHARISTIC SPECIES AFTER COMMUNION

A SERVICE OF CATHOLICS UNITED FOR THE FAITH

## ISSUE

What are the Church's norms for handling the Body and Blood of our Lord after Communion and after Mass? How may we dispose of remaining Eucharistic Bread or Precious Blood?

## RESPONSE

The Latin Church provides norms on this issue in two documents: *The General Instruction to the Roman Missal* (GIRM)<sup>1</sup>, and *This Holy and Living Sacrifice* (THLS)<sup>2</sup>. Eastern rite Catholics should consult the particular law of their ritual church.

Most importantly, Eucharistic Bread remaining after communion must be reserved or consumed. The Precious Blood remaining must be consumed. When handling the Eucharistic species, the greatest care and reverence must be used. One is handling God.

## DISCUSSION

When a Catholic priest consecrates the bread and wine, it becomes the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

After the consecration it is the true body of Christ, which was born of the Virgin, and which hung on the cross as an offering for the salvation of the world, and which sits at the right hand of the Father. And it is the true blood of Christ which was poured forth from His side. And Christ is present not merely by virtue of the sign and power of the sacrament but

in His proper nature and true substance as is set down in this summary.<sup>3</sup>

As Christ emptied Himself and took the form of a slave, accepting death for our sake (Phil. 2:7,8), so now He empties Himself further and takes the form of Bread and Wine. Under the form of Bread and Wine, He remains subject to our care. His gift of Self demands from us the greatest care and reverence we can offer.

Because the sacred vessels hold the Body and Blood of Christ, particles of the Sacred Species remain in them after communion. In substance, these particles are the Body and Blood of our Lord. The norms for purification provide for the proper handling and reverential care of the Sacred Species.

The *General Instruction to the Roman Missal* (GIRM) provides the following norms concerning purification of vessels.

- Whenever a fragment of the host adheres to his fingers, especially after the fraction or the Communion of the faithful, the priest is to wipe his fingers over the paten or, if necessary, wash them. Likewise, he should also gather any fragments that may have fallen outside the paten (no. 278).
- The sacred vessels are purified by the priest, the deacon, or an instituted acolyte after Communion or after Mass, insofar as possible at the credence table. The purification of the chalice is done with water alone or with wine and water, which is then drunk by whoever does the purification. The paten is usually wiped clean with the purificator (no. 238).

<sup>1</sup> This document provides the general norms governing the celebration of Mass for the whole Western Church. It was published in 1970.

<sup>2</sup> Promulgated by the U.S. Bishops with Vatican approval in 1985, this document provides specific norms

governing communion under both species for the Latin Rite dioceses of the United States.

<sup>3</sup> Sixth Council of Rome (1079), Profession of Faith for Berengarius of Tours. Translation by the Jesuit Fathers of St. Mary's College, *The Church Teaches*, Tan Books, 1973, 276.

## Handling the Eucharist

- If a host or any particle should fall, it is to be picked up reverently. If any of the Precious Blood is spilled, the area where the spill occurred should be washed with water, and this water should then be poured into the sacrarium in the sacristy (no. 239).

In *This Holy and Living Sacrifice*, the U.S. Bishops, again with Vatican approval, provide further norms:

After Communion the Eucharistic Bread that remains is to be stored in the tabernacle. Care should be taken in regard to any fragments remaining on the corporal or in the sacred vessels. In those instances when there remains more consecrated wine than was necessary, the ministers shall consume it immediately at a side table before the Prayer after Communion, while the vessels themselves may be purified after Mass (THLS, no. 36).

*This Holy and Living Sacrifice* further specifies: "It is strictly prohibited to pour the Precious Blood into the ground or into the sacrarium" (THLS, no. 38). This norm demands that the Precious Blood must be consumed. There is only one exception: "The consecrated wine may not be reserved, except for

someone who is ill. Sick people who cannot receive the Eucharistic Bread may receive Communion "under the form of wine alone" (THLS, no. 37). THLS, no. 37 further provides that:

if the wine is consecrated at a Mass not celebrated in the presence of the sick person, the Blood of the Lord is kept in a properly covered vessel and is placed in the tabernacle after communion. The Precious Blood should be carried to the sick in a vessel which is closed in such a way as to eliminate all danger of spilling. If some of the Precious Blood remains, it should be consumed by the minister, who should also see to it that the vessel is properly purified.

Careful and reverential handling of the Sacred Species expresses our faith in the Real Presence. In our day, when a large number of Catholics no longer believe in the Real Presence, such assiduous care becomes a witness to the truths of Christ's humility and Self sacrifice. When one embraces the fullness of the Catholic Faith, following precepts such as these becomes a joy and a means of reverence to God.

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