

Liturgical Theology and Law Concerning Reservation, Adoration and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

A Document of the Office of Worship, Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

The guiding document for Exposition and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is entitled Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass¹ (HCWEOM). What follows are some basic principles that flow from this document or other guidelines.

Background and Theology

Definition of Terms

Adoration: The acknowledgment of God as God, Creator and Savior, the Lord and Master of everything that exists. Through worship and prayer, the Church and individual persons give to God the adoration which is the first act of the virtue of religion. The first commandment of the law obliges us to adore God. Adoration is the first act of the virtue of religion. To adore God is to acknowledge him as God, as the Creator and Savior, the Lord and Master of everything that exists, as infinite and merciful Love. "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve," says Jesus, citing Deuteronomy.²

Exposition: The liturgical rite of Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in which the Blessed Sacrament is exposed in a monstrance or a ciborium and either placed upon an altar or carried in procession. Adoration occurs during exposition.

Benediction: A concluding blessing rite for the rite of Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament which includes an appropriate hymn, incensation of the Blessed Sacrament, a closing prayer and Eucharistic Blessing.

Eucharist: The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life" (LG 11). "The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch" (PO 5). "The Eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of that communion in the divine life and that unity of the People of God by which the Church is kept in being. It is the culmination both of God's action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship men offer to Christ and through him to the Father in the Holy Spirit." (*Eucharisticum mysterium*, 6) Finally, by the Eucharistic celebration we already unite ourselves with the heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life, when God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28). In brief, the Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith: "Our way of thinking is attuned

¹ Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*, 1973.

² Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2096. See also, 2628 and 1083.

to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking. (St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 4, 18, 5).³

Eucharist: Food for the Journey

During Jesus' earthly ministry, his words and deeds were compelling. They challenged and encouraged, comforted and convicted, revealed and mystified. Those who came to know him as the Son of God, stayed with him and at the end of his earthly ministry he broke bread with them and celebrated a meal which he redefined so that they would remember what he had taught them:

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins." (Mt 26:26-28; cf. Mk 14:22-24, Lk 22:17-20, 1 Cor 11:23-25)

We also know that on that first day of the week after his Passion, those who had followed him closest were confused, dejected, sad and lost until they recognized him in the breaking of the bread which gave them strength and peace.

The disciples who encountered the Risen Lord on the road to Emmaus sum up our encounter with the Lord. Pope John Paul II summarized it this way:

Mane nobiscum, Domine! Stay with us, Lord! (cf. Lk 24:29)
With these words, the disciples on the road to Emmaus invited the mysterious Wayfarer to stay with them, as the sun was setting on that first day of the week when the incredible had occurred. According to his promise, Christ had risen; but they did not yet know this. Nevertheless, the words spoken by the Wayfarer along the road made their hearts burn within them. So they said to him: "Stay with us". Seated around the supper table, they recognized him in the "breaking of bread" - and suddenly he vanished. There remained in front of them the broken bread; there echoed in their hearts the gentle sound of his words.⁴

As Christ speaks to us and as we walk with him as disciples, our hearts burn with love. Our relationship leads us to take time to sit with him and remember what he has done and taught. We want to reflect and meditate on all that He is and all he offers. We want to contemplate the face of God revealed in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Christ promises to be with us until the end of time.⁵

³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1324-1327

⁴ John Paul II, *Urbi et Orbi Message*, Easter Sunday, 27 March 2005.

⁵ See Mtt 28:20.

Real Presence

Christ's presence allows us to encounter him time and again. In the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy from the Second Vatican Council, the Church teaches:

*"Christ is always present in his Church, especially in its liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of his minister, 'the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross,' but especially under the eucharistic elements. By his power he is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ himself who baptizes. He is present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for he promised: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Mt 18:20)."*⁶

Of the many ways in which Christ is present in the Church, the Eucharist is cherished as the means *par excellence*.

Purpose of the Liturgy and the Eucharist

The Church teaches, in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, that the goal of all the Church's activity is that all people be one in their praise of God and come together "to take part in the sacrifice, and to eat the Lord's Supper."⁷ It is the Eucharist, which is our food for our journey to the Lord. It is the Eucharist which strengthens us to remain faithful and which shapes us ever more completely to be members of Christ's body. It is the Eucharist, which is the source of every good work undertaken. "The Eucharist contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth, that is Christ himself. He is our Passover and living bread; through his flesh, made living and life-giving by the Holy Spirit, he is bringing life to people and in this way inviting and leading them to offer themselves together with him, as well as their labors and all created things."⁸

The purpose of the Eucharist is first and foremost to provide spiritual nourishment to the faithful. Jesus said: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. . . . For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink" (Jn 6:51-55). The whole Christ is truly present, body, blood, soul, and divinity, under the appearances of bread and wine—the glorified Christ who rose from the dead after dying for our sins. This is what the Church means when she speaks of the "Real Presence" of Christ in the Eucharist. This presence of Christ in the Eucharist is called "real" not to exclude other types of his presence as if they could not be understood as real (cf. Catechism, no. 1374). The risen Christ is present to his Church in many ways, but most especially

⁶ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 7.

⁷ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 10.

⁸ *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass [hereafter HCWEOM]*, no. 1.

through the sacrament of his Body and Blood.⁹ Borrowing from the doctrine of transubstantiation, Christ's presence in the Eucharist is a *substantial* presence.

Eucharistic Reservation

After the consecration of the Eucharist, the bread and wine are no longer bread and wine but instead the body, blood, humanity and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ remains present until the consecrated elements cease to exist. In other words, until the Eucharistic species under the appearance of bread or wine is consumed and digested so that the form of bread or wine no longer exists.

While it is possible for the Eucharistic elements to be consumed during the communion rite of the Mass, some portion of the Eucharist under the form of bread is usually reserved to be taken to the sick and the dying who could not be present with the community for the Eucharistic Liturgy. This is the purpose of the reserved Sacrament.

Because Christ is truly present in the Eucharistic elements, we adore Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. This is a secondary gift given to the Church. The practice of adoring Christ in this heavenly food developed very early in the Church's tradition.

Place of Reservation (Including Temporarily)

The Eucharist *must* be reserved in the cathedral church or its equivalent, in every parish church and in the church or oratory attached to the house of a religious institute or society of apostolic life.

The Eucharist *may* be reserved in a chapel of a bishop and, with the permission of the local ordinary, in other churches, oratories or chapels.¹⁰

The Eucharist should be regularly reserved in only one tabernacle for a church or oratory. The location of the tabernacle is to be prominent, conspicuous, beautifully decorated and suitable for prayer. The tabernacle is to be solid, immovable, opaque and locked.¹¹ A special lamp, fueled by way of oil, is to burn at the tabernacle to indicate and honor the presence of Christ.¹²

The place of reservation should be a space that is dedicated to Christ present in the Eucharist and that is designed so that the attention of one praying there is drawn to the tabernacle that houses the presence of the Lord. Iconography can be chosen from the rich treasury of symbolism that is associated with the Eucharist.¹³ Suitability of its location is made by reason of the quietness of the location, the space available in front of the tabernacle, and also the supply of benches or seats and kneelers.¹⁴

⁹USCCB, *The Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist: Basic Questions and Answers*, no. 1, 2001.

¹⁰ Canon 934.

¹¹ Canon 938, HCWEOM 10.

¹² Canon 940, GIRM 316, HCWEOM 11.

¹³ *Built of Living Stones* 73

¹⁴ *Redemptionis Sacramentum* 130 (hereafter RS)

The Eucharist may not be reserved outside of a parish church, approved chapel or oratory. It is never permitted to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in one's home, office or other place.

Transporting the Blessed Sacrament

It is not licit to keep the Eucharist on one's person or to carry the Eucharist on a journey unless there is an urgent pastoral need.¹⁵ The Blessed Sacrament is to be transported reverently in a pyx. Only a priest, deacon, instituted acolyte or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion should transport the Blessed Sacrament when bringing communion to the sick or on occasion when communion is taken to a group that is unable to celebrate the Eucharist on a Sunday.

When communion has been distributed, the remaining hosts should be returned to the tabernacle immediately or consumed. It is entirely inappropriate that ministers would conduct ordinary business, e.g., stopping for a meal or shopping, when transporting the Blessed Sacrament.

The pyx is to be purified by lightly rinsing the vessel and consuming the water. After the remaining elements have been consumed, the vessel should be washed with mild detergent.

Relationship Between the Mass and Adoration

"The worship of the Eucharist outside of the Mass is of inestimable value for the life of the Church. This worship is strictly linked to the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The presence of Christ under the sacred species reserved after Mass – a presence which lasts as long as the species of bread and of wine remain – derives from the celebration of the sacrifice and is directed towards communion, both sacramental and spiritual. It is the responsibility of Pastors to encourage, also by their personal witness, the practice of Eucharistic adoration, and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in particular, as well as prayer of adoration before Christ present under the Eucharistic species."

"It is pleasant to spend time with him, to lie close to his breast like the Beloved Disciple (cf. Jn 13:25) and to feel the infinite love present in his heart. If in our time Christians must be distinguished above all by the 'art of prayer', how can we not feel a renewed need to spend time in spiritual converse, in silent adoration, in heartfelt love before Christ present in the Most Holy Sacrament? How often, dear brother and sisters, have I experienced this, and drawn from it strength, consolation and support!"

"This practice, repeatedly praised and recommended by the Magisterium, is supported by the example of many saints. Particularly outstanding in this regard was Saint Alphonsus Liguori, who wrote: 'Of all devotions, that of adoring Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is the greatest after the sacraments, the one dearest to God and the one

¹⁵ Canon 935.

most helpful to us'. 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. A Christian community desirous of contemplating the face of Christ in the spirit which I proposed in the Apostolic Letters *Novo Millennio Ineunte* and *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* cannot fail also to develop this aspect of Eucharistic worship, which prolongs and increases the fruits of our communion in the body and blood of the Lord.¹⁶

“Worship of the Blessed Sacrament is, as it were, the spiritual ‘context’ in which the community can celebrate the Eucharist well and in truth. Only if it is preceded, accompanied and followed by this inner attitude of faith and adoration can the liturgical action express its full meaning and value. The encounter with Jesus in Holy Mass is truly and fully brought about when the community can recognize that in the Sacrament he dwells in his house, waits for us, invites us to his table, then, after the assembly is dismissed, stays with us, with his discreet and silent presence, and accompanies us with his intercession, continuing to gather our spiritual sacrifices and offer them to the Father”¹⁷

Therefore both public and private devotion to the Most Holy Eucharist even outside Mass should be vigorously promoted, for by means of it the faithful give adoration to Christ, truly and really present.¹⁸

“When the faithful adore Christ present in the sacrament, they should remember that this presence derives from the Sacrifice [of the Mass] and has as its purpose both sacramental and spiritual communion.”¹⁹

In order to assist the faithful to maintain this proper relationship, it is very appropriate that the celebration of the Mass immediately precede the period of exposition and adoration.²⁰

Distinction between Adoration and Exposition

Eucharistic Adoration is silent private prayer before the Blessed Sacrament housed within in the tabernacle.²¹ This practice is strongly encouraged in every parish and may be observed over an extended period of time.

Eucharistic Exposition is the public liturgical ritual whereby the Blessed Sacrament is exposed in the monstrance or ciborium for the veneration of the faithful. By its nature as a liturgical ritual, Eucharistic Exposition consists of the liturgical rites of Exposition, Adoration, Benediction, and Reposition of the Blessed Sacrament. The period of Adoration includes song, prayers, and readings to mark the time and to help direct the

¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 25: AAS 95 (2003) pp. 449-450

¹⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, Rome 2012.

¹⁸ RS, 134

¹⁹ HCWEOM, 80.

²⁰ HCWEOM, 94.

²¹ USCCB, Thirty-One Questions on Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, #8.

attention of the faithful. Suitable periods of silence are also required.²² A homily or reflection is also appropriate.

The rite requires a number of people to be present before this liturgy is appropriately celebrated.²³ Exposition is not permitted when only one person is present.²⁴ When sufficient numbers are not present, the Blessed Sacrament is reposed. Reposition of the Blessed Sacrament may not occur more than twice in a day.²⁵ The exposed Blessed Sacrament must never be left unattended, even briefly.²⁶ It is also never permitted to simply cover the Blessed Sacrament with a veil when unattended or to lock the Blessed Sacrament in a closet or room.

Shorter periods of Exposition may be scheduled. However, the period of Adoration must be suitably long enough for readings, songs and prayers prior to the Eucharistic Blessing. Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament solely for the purpose of giving the benediction is prohibited.²⁷

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament may be held in churches, or oratories which are permitted to reserve the Blessed Sacrament, observing the norms of the liturgical books. A period of Exposition may not be held in the same part of the church or oratory when Mass is being celebrated.²⁸ It is recommended that where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, that Exposition be held at least once a year, provided that a suitable gathering of the faithful is expected and the norms of the liturgical books are observed.²⁹

If Exposition is planned for a day or several days, it should be interrupted during the celebration of the Mass unless Mass is celebrated in a chapel separate from the area of Exposition and at least some of the faithful remain in adoration.³⁰

Perpetual Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in a parish requires the explicit written permission of the archbishop.

Signs of Reverence

“Genuflection in the presence of the blessed sacrament, whether reserved in the tabernacle or exposed for public adoration, is on one knee.”

“For exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance, four to six candles are lighted, as at Mass, and incense is used.”

²² HCWEOM 95.

²³ HCWEOM 86, *Eucharisticum mysterium*, 63, Canon 942

²⁴ Ibid. Practically, if only a single worshiper is present who becomes ill or must respond to an emergency, the proper security of the Blessed Sacrament cannot be assured.

²⁵ HCWEOM, 88.

²⁶ RS, 138.

²⁷ HCWEOM 89.

²⁸ Canon 941

²⁹ Canon 942.

³⁰ HCWEOM 83.

For exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the ciborium, as least two candles should be lighted and incense may be used.³¹

It is inappropriate for the faithful to hold private conversations, talk on the phone, or read a book (other than spiritual reading). During the period of adoration.

Minister of Exposition

The ordinary minister of exposition is a priest or a deacon. In the absence of a priest or deacon, an instituted acolyte or other extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may expose the Blessed Sacrament and then later repose.

To expose the Blessed Sacrament, an extraordinary minister may open the tabernacle, place the ciborium on the altar or the Host in the monstrance. At the end of the period of adoration, the minister may then replace the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle. An extraordinary minister does not give the blessing with the Blessed Sacrament as a priest or deacon may.³²

Vesture

A priest or a deacon vests in an alb or a surplice over a cassock, and a stole. An extraordinary minister may wear an alb or a coat and tie for men or a professional pantsuit or dress for women as instructed by the archbishop in the Archdiocesan Guidelines pertaining to extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion.

When exposing the Blessed Sacrament and when giving the blessing, a priest or deacon should wear a white cope and humeral veil to give the final blessing at the end of adoration.³³

Rite of Exposition and Benediction

Liturgy of the Hours

During extended periods of Exposition, the Liturgy of the Hours may be celebrated before the Blessed Sacrament.³⁴

Rosary

The Rosary may be prayed before the Blessed Sacrament. The Rosary, though clearly Marian in character, is at heart a Christ centered prayer. In the sobriety of its elements, it has all the depth of the Gospel message in its entirety, of which it can be said to be a compendium. It is an echo of the prayer of Mary, her perennial Magnificat for the work of the redemptive Incarnation which began in her virginal womb. With the Rosary, the

³¹ HCWEOM, 84-85.

³² HCWEOM, 91.

³³ HCWEOM, 92.

³⁴ HCWEOM, 96.

Christian people sit at the school of Mary and is led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love. Through the Rosary the faithful receive abundant grace, as though from the very hands of the Mother of the Redeemer.³⁵

In addition to announcing the mystery, reading an appropriate portion of Scripture helps to guide the meditation on the mystery. Time for silent reflection is also important.³⁶

Preparation

- + The appropriate place for the celebration of Exposition and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is in a Church or Chapel with the Blessed Sacrament exposed upon the altar.
- + The top of the altar is to be covered with a white cloth;
- + 4 to 6 candles for exposition in a monstrance or 2 to 4 candles for exposition in a ciborium;
- + Thurible, charcoal, incense, matches
- + Cope and humeral veil

Overview of the Rite

There are many prepared outlines of the rite which may be celebrated in the parish. Some are given on the Office of Worship web page www.archgh.org/worship/Eucharistic_Exposition.

The Liturgical Press has prepared a ritual text entitled Order for the Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist. Contact the Office of Worship for more information or to purchase a copy.

It is preferred that the host used in Exposition be consecrated in a Mass immediately before the period of exposition.

During the Mass, at the end of Communion, the priest leaves the Blessed Sacrament on the altar either in a ciborium or in the monstrance. The Mass ends with the Prayer after Communion. The Concluding Rites are omitted. The priest may incense the Blessed Sacrament before departing.

If Exposition does not begin with the celebration of the Mass what follows outlines the rite:

Hymn

After all have assembled, a priest or deacon, wearing cope and humeral veil, brings the Blessed Sacrament to the Altar in a monstrance, a song may be sung. He may be accompanied by altar servers with candles.

³⁵ John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, no. 1.

³⁶ John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, no. 30.

The Blessed Sacrament is placed on the altar. The priest or deacon then kneels before the altar and incenses the Blessed Sacrament. The opening song is concluded and a period of silent prayer follows.

Opening Prayer

The priest or deacon then goes to the chair, where he prays the opening prayer.

Liturgy of the Word

One or more readings from Sacred Scripture follow. A suitable pause for silent reflection follows each reading. A spiritual song or a psalm may be sung in response to the Word.³⁷

Homily\Reflection

The priest or deacon may then give a homily following the last reading. A reading from the Church Fathers or the Saints would also be appropriate.

Intercessions (or Litany of the Holy Eucharist)

The faithful intercede for the needs of the world and the local community.

Lord's Prayer

Benediction

Reposition and Hymn

³⁷ See HCWEOM, nos. 113-188. Readings from the Votive Mass of the Holy Eucharist and the Votive Mass of the Sacred Heart are appropriate.