

THE MASS PART XXXI

By Fr. Tim Church

FOLLOWING COMMUNION

Some of what follows Communion is practical. The Church's understanding of the Real Presence of Christ in the species of bread and wine directs us to treat whatever remains after communion with the greatest devotion and respect. The remaining hosts that were used for the communion of the people are collected into one (or more) vessels, and these are placed in the Tabernacle. Any particles of bread and remaining wine are carefully collected into one of the cups and are then placed on the credence table.

In Masses where only a few are in attendance, the chalice may be cleansed at the altar by the priest. Where many people are present, such as on Sunday or even week day Masses, the vessels are placed on the credence table and are cleansed (purified) after the Mass.

One of the troublesome extremes regarding the Blessed Sacrament is the temptation to scrupulosity. Here there is a concern for even microscopic particles of the Blessed Sacrament. Usually scruple is associated with particular attitudes that make our concern for others completely secondary to our paying attention to what is truly small. Jesus expressed grave concern for the Pharisees in this regard. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence." (Matthew 23:25)

Reasonable care is a necessary prevention of scrupulosity. The key is simple. In order to determine what is or is not inappropriate, or is or is not a sin, we turn to the Church to follow her direction. For actually a long period of time, the Church instructed the priest to hold his index finger and thumb together during the Mass to insure that a particle of the host that may have remained on the priest's finger did not fall to the ground. Every priest was trained to do this. They even learned to turn pages and pick up objects while never letting go of thumb and finger! The General Instructions of the Roman Missal no longer require this, and the attitude that lays beneath it is also gone.

There is, however, an equally damaging and perhaps far more pervasive attitude that demonstrates a lack of reverence for things that are holy. This is now an almost indigenous part of our culture. Here, the challenge is more difficult, because it involves the recognition that what we handle is not ordinary. The remedy involves many aspects of our character. The failure to develop respect as a foundation of a person's (and a culture's) character can lead to a slow erosion of our integrity.

A final prayer is said after the vessels have been removed from the altar. If a period of silence has not occurred already, it is observed here. A space of time to allow for private prayer is helpful both to promote a sense of reverence, and to more fully incorporate the benefits of our communion into our daily life. For the bulk of the congregation this takes place as others receive communion, but it is still helpful for all of us to spend some short span of time in private prayer.

Announcements are common at Sunday Mass, and are to follow the final prayer. It is important that people do not leave before these and the blessing and dismissal occur. To leave now would be a very rude act. Common respect directs us to allow the priest to complete what he believes important for the community. The announcements contain important information for how we as a parish family are attempting to accomplish our work as God's People. It is important for all to remain to find out how we can help. In our parish, it is customary to take second collections here, when directed by our bishop or some urgent necessity. To leave before this is to miss the opportunity to help. We also celebrate birthdays and wedding anniversaries to further give opportunity for our parish to deepen our love for one another.

Finally, the priest gives the entire people a blessing. This is a late addition to the Mass. In ancient times the priest blessed individuals who requested it as he returned to the sacristy. This practice continues today as the priest greets the people after Mass. The offering of the Mass has a deep effect on us as a community. There is a rich sense of God's love and his Holy Spirit moving among us as the Mass is concluded.