

Reverence Toward the Blessed Sacrament

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Of the various threads woven throughout Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, the revised *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* and *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, one of great concern is the reverence shown toward the Blessed Sacrament. The purpose of reserving the consecrated species of the Lord's Body in the tabernacle is again affirmed in these recent documents as they have been since the norms of the Second Vatican Council were issued. "The sacred species are reserved after Mass principally so that the faithful who cannot be present at Mass, above all the sick and those advanced in age, may be united by sacramental Communion to Christ and his Sacrifice which is offered in the Mass. In addition, this reservation also permits the practice of adoring this great Sacrament and offering it the worship due to God" (RS, art. 129).

Regarding the location where the tabernacle is to be placed, *Redemptionis Sacramentum* reiterates the norms published in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* and additional directives approved by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in their 2000 publication *Built of Living Stones*. "The Most Holy Sacrament is to be reserved in a tabernacle in a part of the church that is noble, prominent, readily visible, and adorned in a dignified manner" (RS, art.130, GIRM, art. 314-317). The intent of this directive is to underscore the fact that there is a connection between the celebration of Mass and the two reasons mentioned above for reserving the Blessed Sacrament: spiritual food for those who cannot be present for Mass and adoration.

The reverence expressed toward the Blessed Sacrament is serious enough a concern that additional directives for those entrusted with taking it to the sick and homebound are reminded that "it is forbidden to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in a place that is not subject in a secure way to the authority of the diocesan Bishop, or where there is a danger of profanation... no one may carry the Most Holy Eucharist to his or her home [to be reserved]" (RS, art. 131-132).

Some stories are retold of ministers, ordained and non-ordained, who may place the Blessed Sacrament in the glove compartment of their car only to be forgotten as a result of some other errand or diversion. There may be some who place the vessel (pyx) containing the consecrated host in a coat pocket, pants pocket or hand bag only to be rustled among loose change and car keys. A certain decorum is to be followed when handling the Blessed Sacrament. The pyx containing the consecrated host should be placed in a burse and worn around the neck to identify the fact that one is carrying the

Blessed Sacrament on their person. Further, priests, deacons and extraordinary ministers who take Holy Communion to the sick “should go insofar as possible directly from the place where the Sacrament is reserved to the sick person’s home, leaving aside any profane business so that any danger of profanation may be avoided and the greatest reverence for the Body of Christ may be ensured” (RS, art. 133).

These pastoral directives call the Catholic faithful to a renewed understanding of the presence of Christ among us, especially in the Blessed Sacrament reserved in our churches. It requires our utmost care and reverence when it is reserved in a tabernacle and an even greater care when we have the privilege to carry it on our person for the spiritual and pastoral care of others.