

Keeping Quality and Appropriateness in Catholic Worship

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I remember years ago as a seminary student one of my instructors observing that directives issued by the Catholic Church at a world-wide Council would normally take 100 years to fully implement. If that observation is true in any way, then the on-going renewal and the implementation of the Second Vatican Council are still a work in progress. On December 4, 2006, the Catholic Church will commemorate the forty-third anniversary of the promulgation of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. This constitution, along with *Mediator Dei*, the 1947 papal encyclical which provided the ground work for the liturgy schema at Vatican II, remain as the guide to our on-going liturgical renewal.

It remains clear, as it did at the time of composing these critical documents, that the full, conscious and active participation of the entire Church is the goal of all liturgical renewal. Implied within that primary aim, the dignity, quality and appropriateness of our worship is to be maintained. Mass is a holy gathering where a holy action takes place. It requires a language and communication of its own and it does. What the liturgical renewal of Vatican II aimed to achieve was a worshipping event that raised the unified voice of the entire Church in praise of God. Just as God took great care in creating us, our assent to His love for us deserves the same care and attention.

The idea of giving God our very best in a dignified way is reflected in the directives issued by the Holy See concerning the kinds of sacred vessels [chalices, patens and communion cups] used at Mass. Normally they are to be made of precious metals. The revised *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* indicates that “In the United States...sacred vessels may also be made from other solid materials that, according to the common estimation of each region, are precious, for example, ebony or other hard woods, provided that such materials are suited for sacred use and do not easily break or deteriorate. This applies to all vessels which hold the hosts, such as the paten, the ciborium, the pyx, the monstrance and other things of this kind” (GIRM, 329). A further clarification was issued in 2004 by the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments regarding the use of breakable materials in the creation of communion vessels used at Mass. “Reprobated...is the practice of using for the celebration of Mass...vessels made from glass, earthenware, clay or other materials that break easily” (*Redemptionis sacramentum*, 117).

While every conceivable mishap involving spillage or breakage from the vessels used for the distribution of Holy Communion will never be avoided completely, we have an obligation to render God the very best in our worship. First and foremost, this implies the very hearts and souls of the people gathered to praise God. Coupled with the praise of the living Church are the vessels or instruments we use to bless God. These, by their design and the materials with which they are constructed, have something to say about human beings in relation to God. Durable materials, such as metal chalices, communion cups, pyxes and patens speak of the unique purpose and role these vessels undertake in our sacred rites. We use them for nothing else but the celebration of Mass. The Lord's Body and Blood contained in those vessels becomes for us the unbreakable bond with Jesus Christ. Celebrating Mass is no ordinary thing, but an extraordinary occasion to render to the Triune God all that we have and all that we offer.

Acquiring communion vessels that are worthy and unbreakable represents an investment, but their use also says something about our understanding of the Mass and the unique gift the Lord's Body and Blood becomes to the worshipping community. Parishes that still use glass or ceramic chalices, communion cups, patens and bowl patens need to plan a strategy of acquiring vessels in keeping with the Church's liturgical norms. Parishioners may wish to offset the expense of purchasing metal communion cups as a gift in memory of a loved one or in honor of a living relative. In the Toledo diocese, liturgical grants have been awarded to local parishes in the name of Rev. August Schafer, a priest of the diocese who created an endowment to be used in promoting the liturgy in our local parishes. This grant program could possibly assist some of our parishes in the purchase of vessels possessing the quality and appropriateness called for in our Catholic worship.