

Vessels Used at Mass

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Recent liturgical changes not only express a spiritual and theological reality, but also possess a practical purpose. This is the case when speaking about liturgical vessels, especially chalices, communion cups, flagons and patens. The underlying concern woven throughout the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* and *Redemptionis Sacramentum* is the quality and durability of liturgical appointments. “Reprobated, therefore, is any practice of using for the celebration of Mass common vessels, or others lacking in quality, or devoid of all artistic merit or which are mere containers, as also other vessels made from glass, earthenware, clay or other materials that break easily.” (RS, art. 117) This directive is even applicable to metals used in the production of liturgical vessels that easily rust or deteriorate. The whole import of this directive is to provide a certain reverence and care toward the Body and Blood of Christ. This is such, the directive emphasizes, “so that honor will be given to the Lord by their use, and all risk of diminishing the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharistic species in the eyes of the faithful will be avoided.” (RS, art.117)

Another change in ritual procedure is the way in which flagons or carafes are used for the celebration of Mass. Until the most recent directives, it was customary in many U.S. dioceses to pour the Blood of Christ from a flagon into communion cups placed on the altar during the Lamb of God just before the Communion Rite. The flagon of wine was brought forward during the preparation of the gifts and placed on the altar during the Eucharistic Prayer. At the Lamb of God, the empty communion cups were brought to the altar and the Blood of Christ was poured into them. In *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, the issue is not that a flagon is prohibited for use during Mass, but *when* it is used during Mass. “The pouring of the Blood of Christ after the consecration from one vessel to another is completely to be avoided, lest anything should happen that would be to the detriment of so great a mystery. Never to be used for containing the Blood of the Lord are flagons, bowls or other vessels...” (RS, art.106) This norm is concerned with the consecrated species and its proper dispensing.

Communities wishing to bring a flagon containing wine that will be consecrated may do so during the preparation of the gifts, but the wine must be poured into the communion cups at that time and not after the Eucharistic Prayer. This requires that all of the communion cups to be used are to be placed on the altar during the preparation of the gifts. If there are a large number of cups to be used for the Communion Rite, it is advisable to prepare the cups before Mass. That is, the wine would be poured in each communion cup, placed on a tray and brought to the altar during the preparation of the

gifts. As mentioned above, the care and reverence toward the consecrated species is the motivation underlying this instruction. A cruet of wine to be poured in the celebrant's chalice and the bread to be consecrated for Mass would be brought forward by members of the assembly during the preparation of the gifts.

Purchasing the appropriate vessels that conform to the new directives will take time and careful planning. It will require proper budgeting. Many of our parishes have been able to purchase new vessels through the kindness of donors as a family or individual memorial. The concerns over vessels used at Mass are one small part of the overarching call to love and reverence our Eucharistic Lord.