



LITURGICAL ABUSES

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WHAT IS LITURGICAL ABUSE?

What is a “liturgical abuse”? A liturgical abuse occurs when the priest intentionally deviates from the norms of the Mass, substituting his private alterations for the liturgical norms and rubrics of the Mass, as set forth in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (the GIRM).

WHAT IS LITURGICAL ABUSE?

Most errors are minor and can be overlooked. The priest may forget to open the Mass with the sign of the Cross or may forget to include the Kyrie. While these minor errors may detract from the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, they do not render the Mass invalid or illicit. Accidents do happen, and even the most reverent and careful priest may make a mistake during the course of the Mass.

WHAT IS LITURGICAL ABUSE?

The Liturgy is sacred and sacramental. It is also a public, communal celebration in accordance with the entire Church, a “sacrament of unity”. It is not a private act of the priest in which he is the celebrant and we are merely observers. We are active participants of the Mass. When abuses occur-- the priest, the congregation, and the entire unity of the Church – is harmed.

WHAT IS LITURGICAL ABUSE?

All liturgical abuses are, by their very nature, serious offenses against the Body and Blood of our Lord. The laity should know the Mass in order to know when something has gone wrong in the Mass. We have to become familiar with the Mass. The Missalettes in the pews will have the words of the Mass, starting with the Entrance Procession, to the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist and finally the Concluding Rite. Follow along with the prayers and actively participate in the Mass. Learn the sequence of the Mass to get a greater understanding of each section of the mass.

WHAT IS LITURGICAL ABUSE?

Just one-third of U. S. Catholics believe that the Eucharist is the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Most believe that the bread and wine are just symbols of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. When the Mass is presented as something casual, entertaining, or improvisational, the whole point of it disappears. If the priest conducts himself as if Christ were not truly present in the Eucharist, why should the lay people in his parish think the Eucharist means anything? Why go to Mass at all? It has been argued that the loss of structure in the liturgy has caused an erosion of faith. Religious vocations dropped off as the new order of Mass was imposed without the necessary explanation and catechesis.

DISREGARDING THE PRESCRIBED TEXT

This particular abuse is perhaps the most widespread. There is an official order of mass and it is not to be changed or improvised. Lectors at times eliminate male references to God in the Scripture readings. Priests changing the words of the Nicene Creed – omitting the word ‘men’ in “for us men and for our salvation” is quite a common violation. Or, omitting the Creed altogether; saying aloud the prayers to be said quietly – or generalizing them saying for example, “Lord, wash away our iniquities and cleanse us of our sins” (instead of “my” and “me”).

DISREGARDING THE PRESCRIBED TEXT

“Regulations of the sacred liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church, that is, on the Apostolic See and, as laws may determine, on the bishop.” The priest should remember that he is a servant of the Sacred Liturgy and that he himself is not permitted, on his own initiative, to add, to remove, or to change anything in the celebration of Mass. Deviations from the Order are illicit and when done intentionally they’re a grave offense both against the Church and the faithful who have a right to an authentic liturgy.

INTERRUPTING THE MASS

The priest has no more right to interrupt the Mass from the sanctuary than you have to interrupt it from the pews. At the conclusion of Mass the lector or priest may make general announcements for the information of the parish; that's specified in the Order. But no one may interrupt the mass to make announcements, give financial reports, or make pleas for funds. No one may stop the Mass for extra homilies and certainly not for other activities that are themselves unlawful, like skits or a 'liturgical dance'.

OMISSION OF THE PENITENTIAL RITE

A priest may choose to use the rite of blessing and sprinkling as given in the Order, in which case he must omit the “Lord have mercy.” But a priest can never omit the penitential rite altogether, and he cannot give a general absolution during the penitential rite of the Mass as a substitute for individual Reconciliation. There are other options available to the celebrant elsewhere in the Order. The sign of peace, for instance, is optional (GIRM 112). If he includes it, though, the priest is not allowed to leave the sanctuary to exchange it with the congregation (GIRM 136).

REPLACING OR OMITTING THE HOMILY

A priest may omit the homily only on weekdays that are not holy days. On Sundays of holy days he must give a homily. It is not permissible to give a homily that ignores the readings altogether. It should relate the readings to one another and indicate how their message can be applied to the lives of his parishioners. No priest can substitute announcements, financial reports, or pleas in place of the homily, nor add such things to it. Of course the Holy See is not going to make a fuss if he takes a couple of sentences at the end of the homily to make an announcement, tell how much is in the building fund, or mention a second collection. Nobody who is not a priest, deacon, or bishop can give the homily at Mass; nobody who is not ordained can give a 'talk' or 'reflection' in place of the homily. (CIC 766-768).

Dictating Posture

Everybody at Mass is supposed to be uniform in standing, sitting, and kneeling (GIRM 20), and there are universal rules about it. In this country you are still required to kneel during the Consecration, from after the end of the Sanctus until the Great Amen, even if there aren't any kneelers (GIRM 21). You are required to bow or kneel at the words "by the power of the Holy Spirit" in the Creed (GIRM 98). You are required to genuflect whenever you pass the Eucharist, whether it's in the tabernacle or publicly exposed except when in procession (GIRM 233). And contrary to what you might see these days, the Eucharist's tabernacle can't be tucked out of the way. It should be "placed in a part of the church that is prominent, conspicuous, beautifully decorated and suitable for prayer" After Communion, though, you're free to stand, sit, or kneel as you choose.

DICTATING MANNER OF RECEPTION OF THE EUCHARIST

Vatican II never mentioned receiving the host in hand. But when some countries introduced the practice illicitly, Pope Paul VI surveyed the world's bishops to see if it should be allowed where it already existed. Rather than suddenly suppressing reception in the hand, the pope granted an indult intended to let the practice continue for a time in those areas where it already existed. The bishops in the US – where the practice did not exist – asked permission of the Holy See to introduce it here. Still, universal Church law does not permit reception of the Sacrament in the hand, and St. John Paul II disapproved of the practice. The indult that allowed it specified that reception in the hand 'must not be imposed'. Absolutely, no priest or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may refuse to administer the Eucharist on the tongue.

Dictating Manner of Reception of the Eucharist

By the way, as to Eucharistic ministers, it's important to note that they're not supposed to help distribute the Sacrament routinely; only if there's an unusually large number of people at Mass or if they're sent to distribute extraordinarily outside of Mass, as to the sick. They are not supposed to assist at all when a priest is in attendance. Their office has nothing whatever to do with increased participation by the laity.

IGNORING RULES FOR RECEPTION OF THE EUCHARIST

The official statement of the rules for reception has recently been rewritten by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and unfortunately it's pretty vague. But it still says clearly that "in order to be properly disposed to receive communion, participants...normally should have fasted for one hour," abstaining from food and drink except water or medicine. The rewrite also goes to great length to say that non-Christians and Christians not in communion with the Church are welcome to come to Mass, but it's not nearly so clear as it used to be on the fact that they may not receive the Eucharist. The new phrase "ordinarily not admitted to holy communion" makes some Catholics – and some priests—figure that it's alright for non-Catholics to take communion on special occasions like weddings or funerals, or if the non-Catholic is a prominent person like a government official or head of state.

IGNORING RULES FOR RECEPTION OF THE EUCHARIST

Exceptions are so few and given in circumstances so rare that it might have been more helpful to write simply “not admitted to holy communion”; but that’s for the bishops to say. Naturally, you’re also required to be free from “grave sin” – what we used to call “mortal” sin—which means Reconciliation before reception if you have committed a grave offense. And, no, the theology about what constitutes a grave sin has not changed, even if the terminology has.

HOLDING HANDS DURING THE OUR FATHER

This is oddly widespread in the US but it's an illicit addition to the liturgy. The official publication of the Sacred Congregation for the Sacrament and Divine Worship states the practice "must be repudiated ...it is a liturgical gesture introduced spontaneously but on a personal initiative; it is not in the rubrics." And anything not in the rubrics is unlawful. The priest may never invite the congregation to stand around the altar and hold hands during the Consecration.

PERFORMING LITURGICAL DANCE

Performing liturgical dance.

Introducing dance into the liturgy in the US would be to add “one of the most desacralized and desacralizing elements” leading to “an atmosphere of profanity, which would easily suggest to those present worldly places and profane situations. Nor is it acceptable to introduce into the liturgy the so called artistic ballet because it would reduce the liturgy to mere entertainment”.

THE PRIEST WHO THANKS EVERYBODY

The priest who thanks the choir (claps), thanks the ushers (claps), thanks the lectors (claps), etc. “This is most inappropriate and it’s the responsibility of the pastor to make sure that the congregation understands this. The choir is not singing as a matter of entertaining anybody. They’re singing to worship God. We don’t clap for prayer.” “...You don’t clap at the end of Mass because you had a good time. That’s not what its about.” Stated by Fr. Vincent Serpa of Catholic Answers. We pray. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (before he was Pope Benedict XVI) had this to say about applauding at Mass: “Whenever applause breaks out in the liturgy of some human achievement, it is a sure sign that the essence of liturgy has totally disappeared and been replaced by a kind of religious entertainment.

THE PRIEST WHO THANKS EVERYBODY

Such attraction fades quickly – it cannot compete in the market of leisure pursuits, incorporating as it increasingly does various forms of religious titillation. (The Spirit of the Liturgy). Pope John Paul XXII also said as people waited for him to arrive to a church outside of Rome, “I am very glad to have come here. But if I must express a wish, it is that in church you not shout out, that you not clap your hands, and that you not greet even the Pope, **because ‘templum Dei, templum Dei.’ (The temple of God is the temple of God.)** Lastly, Pope Saint Pius X said, “It is not fitting that the servant should be applauded in his Master’s house

PERMITTING OR ENCOURAGING NON-LITURGICAL MUSIC

It's not about taste in music. Music is liturgical, or it's not, and non-liturgical music has no place in the Mass. Sacred music must embrace our communion with God in Heaven, not with each other. As Fr. Paul Scalia has noted in an article on the subject, "Today's modern music is merely a self-centered conversation about us: "He humbles Himself to dwell among us under the form of bread and wine, while we ignore Him and sing about ourselves and to ourselves." Sacrosantum Concilium 116 acknowledges Gregorian chant as specially suited to the Roman liturgy.. It should be given pride of place in liturgical services. But other kinds of music, especially polyphony (the simultaneous combination of two or more tones or melodic lines), are by no means excluded from liturgical celebrations, so long as they accord with the spirit of the liturgical action.

LEX ORANDI, LEX CREDENDI

The way we pray leads to the way we believe. Or, It is in the manner of our prayer that we are formed in the manner of our beliefs. Or, How we pray shapes how we believe. This understanding has shaped the church's approach to the liturgy, especially since the Second Vatican Council initiated the liturgical renewal, and this understanding continues to shape our liturgical life. How we pray matters.