



COMMUNION SERVICES — EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Most Holy Eucharist, “stands at the center of the Church's life”,¹ since it truly “contains the Church’s entire spiritual wealth: Christ himself, our Passover and Living Bread.”² “The Church has received the Eucharist from Christ her Lord not as one gift – however precious – among so many others, but as the gift *par excellence*, for it is the gift of himself, of his person in his sacred humanity, as well as the gift of his saving work.”³ That surpassing gift of the Eucharist is where the Church draws her life, the dynamic force of all her activity and her whole sense of purpose and direction. As the Second Vatican Council proclaimed, the Eucharistic sacrifice is “the source and summit of the Christian life”.⁴

Any discussion of weekday liturgical worship must begin by recalling the importance and normative character of daily Mass in the life of every Catholic community. Pope Paul VI recommended that priests “worthily and devoutly offer Mass each day in order that both they and the rest of the faithful may enjoy the benefits that flow so richly from the sacrifice of the cross.”⁵ Pope John Paul II echoes these words in stating: “We can understand, then, how important it is for the spiritual life of the priest, as well as for the good of the Church and the world, that priests follow the Council’s recommendation to celebrate the Eucharist daily,”⁶ and he like many popes before him, states that “priests should be encouraged to celebrate Mass every day, even in the absence of a congregation, since it is an act of Christ and the Church”.⁷

It is important to make the distinction between the celebration of Holy Mass and the reception of Holy Communion outside of Mass. It is clear that the Sacrifice of the Mass and the Sacrament of the Eucharist cannot be separated theologically and are only separated temporally due to pastoral necessity.

¹ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 2003, 3.

² *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 5.

³ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 11.

⁴ *Lumen Gentium* 11.

⁵ Paul VI, Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei*, 1965, 33

⁶ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 31; cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 13.

⁷ Code of Canon Law c 904

With regard to the separation of the Sacrifice and the Sacrament of the Eucharist, Pope Paul states: "The few things that we have touched upon concerning the Sacrifice of the Mass encourage us to say something about the Sacrament of the Eucharist, since both Sacrifice and Sacrament pertain to the same mystery and cannot be separated from each other. The Lord is immolated in an unbloody way in the Sacrifice of the Mass and He re-presents the sacrifice of the Cross and applies its salvific power at the moment when he becomes sacramentally present — through the words of consecration — as the spiritual food of the faithful, under the appearances of bread and wine."⁸

In the same encyclical Pope Paul makes a distinction between the celebration of Holy Mass and the reception of Holy Communion: "For such a Mass brings a rich and abundant treasure of special graces to help the priest himself, the faithful, the whole Church and the whole world toward salvation—and this same abundance of graces is not gained through mere reception of Holy Communion."⁹

It is the expectation of the Church that: "The faithful should normally receive sacramental Communion of the Eucharist during Mass itself, at the moment laid down by the rite of celebration, that is to say, just after the Priest celebrant's Communion."¹⁰ In fact the Second Vatican Council refers to it as the "more perfect form of participation in the Mass."¹¹

Given the Church's constant teaching with regard to the unity of the Sacrifice and the Sacrament it is clear that the distribution of Holy Communion outside of Mass should only be considered for significant pastoral reasons; e.g., the inability to participate in the Mass due to sickness, incarceration, or the regular and ongoing absence of a priest.

The faithful are to understand that the Eucharistic sacrifice cannot take place without a priest and that although the Holy Communion which they may receive outside of Mass is closely connected with the sacrifice of the Mass, it is not equal to it.¹²

⁸ *Mysterium Fidei* 34

⁹ *Mysterium Fidei* 32

¹⁰ *Redemptionis Sacramentum* 88

¹¹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 55

¹² cf. *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* 17

Therefore accepting the teaching of the Church with regard to the reception of Holy Communion and the celebration of the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass, beginning on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ this year, Archbishop Sample has determined that the distribution of Holy Communion at weekday parish 'Communion Services' will cease. The distinction between these parish weekday services and the distribution of Holy Communion outside of Mass at nursing homes, hospitals and prisons needs to be made.

The continuance of such practices normalizes the separation of Sacrifice and Sacrament and makes ordinary what is envisioned by the Church to be an extraordinary occurrence. Also if faithful have the ability to attend and receive Holy Communion at Mass either the weekend preceding or weekend following then such weekday communion services are rendered pastorally unnecessary.¹³

Each Vicariate has been asked to co-ordinate their daily Mass schedules, and alter them if necessary, to accommodate an easy access to daily Mass for the faithful of each area of the Archdiocese.

There will be those who still wish to gather for prayer on a weekday without Mass, perhaps they cannot attend Mass because of; distance or for lack of time; other duties of state; caregiving; etc.; but who would draw solace from being able to pray with others. This is to be encouraged as a praiseworthy apostolate which is enriching to the faithful as a participation in the 'continuous prayer' of the Church.

The Office of Divine Worship has produced a booklet *Parish Weekday Prayer*, which is an adaption of the Liturgy of the Hours which incorporates the daily Lectionary for use in parishes where the faithful wish to gather in the absence of a priest for daily prayer.

Daily Mass is the ideal and efforts should be made with a certain flexibility on the part of the faithful and our pastors to achieve daily participation for those who desire it.

This change will take effect beginning on The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, 3 June 2018.

¹³ cf. *Redemptionis Sacramentum* 166