



The Celebration of the Mass

The celebration of Mass is the form of worship handed down to us by the Lord Jesus himself at the Last Supper. “Do this in memory of me,” he said to his Apostles. The Church of every age must take care to “do this” in unity with all believers, past, present, and to come.

It was at this first mass that Jesus told Peter to “strengthen your brethren.” The Successor of Peter inherits this responsibility to oversee the abiding unity of Eucharistic worship throughout the world. In union with the pope each bishop has apostolic authority to do the same in the diocese entrusted to his care.

In this spirit I met with the instituted Acolytes (English and Spanish) at the Powell Butte Retreat Center in late September to explain new diocesan norms for the celebration of Mass. A few weeks later I reviewed them again at the Priests’ Assembly. The results will be apparent by the First Sunday of Advent, when these norms are to go into effect.

The changes to be introduced are relatively minor in scope. They are intended to foster ever greater attention to the Mystery in our midst and to remove obstacles that distract us from it. Let me share with you the basic principles that shaped the norms.

The first is this: “Attention follows motion, not sound.” At Mass all eyes should

be on what’s happening in the sanctuary. But if someone walks down the aisle while the priest is praying or the lector is reading, all eyes will follow the walker and spoken words will fall on ears temporarily deafened by distraction. When someone is speaking, therefore, no one should be moving, especially in the sanctuary.

The second principle is an old Jesuit axiom: “Do what you’re doing.” Doing three things at once in the sanctuary gives the impression that we must get through Mass as quickly as possible. But too rapid a pace overrides our attention and distracts us from letting holy words or actions sink in. Better to draw our attention to one thing at a time.

The third principle—“One bread, one cup”—comes from St. Paul. Jesus gives us his Body and Blood as both the sign and source of our unity in him. There is no greater sign of that unity than the one Bread and the one Cup which we share. But the truth of communion better comes home to us if we see centrally placed on the altar before us *one* chalice and *one* vessel of hosts. The sight of five or six vessels clustered indiscriminately together visibly distracts attention from the unifying force of “One bread, one cup.”

The fourth principle is the name given to the Mass in the Acts of the Apostles: “the Breaking of the Bread.” When the priest solemnly breaks the Host at the Lamb of God, all should be watching attentively, for this action literally shows us that the broken Bread of Life is the *source* of our unity as Christians. And the Breaking continues as the priest distributes consecrated hosts from the one vessel on the altar into empty vessels brought to him during the Greeting of Peace.

From the “one loaf” in the one vessel the Bread to feed the hungry multitude is “multiplied” anew before our eyes.

It is my hope that the new diocesan norms for Mass will deepen the “Eucharistic amazement” which St. John Paul II taught us to treasure.