

# Norms Concerning Eucharistic Adoration & Exposition

## Catholic Diocese of Richmond, Virginia

### Contemplating the Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament

Pope John Paul II reflected in his 2003 encyclical letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*:

It is pleasant to spend time with him, to lie close to his breast like the Beloved Disciple (cf. Jn 13:25) and to feel the infinite love present in his heart. If in our time, Christians must be distinguished above all by the 'art of prayer,' how can we not feel a renewed need to spend time in spiritual converse, in silent adoration, in heartfelt love before Christ present in the Most Holy Sacrament? How often, dear brothers and sisters, have I experienced this, and drawn from it strength, consolation and support?

### Historical Background

The first evidence of reserving a portion of the Eucharist appears in the second century in response to a pastoral need: bringing the Eucharist to those who were not present for the Sunday celebration (St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 67.3.5). By the third century, Christians were carrying a portion of the consecrated bread home in little boxes (*arcae*) and reserving it there in a cupboard or closet to receive during the week, because they only celebrated the Eucharist on Sunday at this time (Cyprian of Carthage, d 258).

Eucharistic reservation and adoration as we know it today came about in the thirteenth century. At this time, participation in Communion by the laity was primarily “visual,” that is, seeing the elevated host was the high point of the Mass, since they rarely received communion. By the fourteenth century, various forms of Eucharistic devotions outside Mass developed for the laity’s participation, such as pilgrimages, processions, and Forty Hours.

Before the Second Vatican Council and the liturgical renewal it gave to the Church, we focused our understanding of the Eucharist mostly upon the bread and wine becoming the Body and Blood of the Lord. Eucharist seemed to equal the Blessed Sacrament present on the altar or reserved in the tabernacle. Private and silent adoration of the Lord truly present on the altar or in the tabernacle appeared to be our primary understanding of Eucharistic worship.

Following the developments of the Liturgical Movement in the early twentieth century, the Second Vatican Council recovered the Church’s liturgical roots and with it, its Eucharistic theology. In the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (CSL)*, the Council Fathers stated: “The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed. At the same time it is the fount from which all the Church’s power flows” (*CSL*, no.10). External and internal participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, especially by reception of Holy Communion was key to the liturgical renewal which Pope Paul VI and the Council instituted.

With the renewal now in place, we realize that our worship is not limited to adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Rather, our preeminent Eucharistic worship is the act of participation in the Mass, culminating in Holy Communion. We understand that, through this participation, we are joined to the Lord offering Himself to the Father. The bread and wine become the Body and Blood of the Lord first of all so that we may share in the Lord's passion, death and resurrection, and be nourished with this bread from heaven.

Visiting the Blessed Sacrament should draw the faithful deeper into the Paschal Mystery and strengthen their desire to lead lives as sharers in the death and resurrection of the Lord. Thus they will foster the right dispositions that enable them to celebrate the Mass and receive frequently the bread given to us by the Father (*Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass [HCWEOM]*, no 80).

## **Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament**

The Church asserts that prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament is a privileged time, a time when we speak to and respond to the prompting of the Eucharistic Lord in our hearts. Just as our Lord needed time to be alone in prayer, so too do we.

As important as private prayer is, it should always lead the individual back to the Lord who is present in the celebration of the Eucharist and in the midst of his people. Christ present in the Eucharist presupposes his presence in the assembly gathered for common prayer, his presence in the word, his presence in the minister, and his presence in the Eucharistic elements (*CSL* 7). Therefore, private devotion and adoration of the reserved Blessed Sacrament should lead the faithful to a fuller appreciation of the communal dimension of the Mass.

Parishes should offer a sound catechesis on the theology of the Eucharist and opportunities for the faithful to gather for prayer before the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle. It is the general understanding of the Church that **the adoration of the Eucharist reserved in the tabernacle is normative and sufficient**. In the history of the Church, this has been the primary way Eucharistic adoration has occurred because it is a devotional practice of the individual. Therefore, it needs no specific guidelines.

"The Blessed Sacrament may be adored while contained in the tabernacle for an extended period of time; this is called '**perpetual adoration.**'" (*Thirty-One Questions on Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament*, USCCB, 2005. no.19). By opening our churches during the day, parishes create a climate for the faithful to come as individuals or as a group to pray for personal/world needs, to grow closer to the Lord, and to grow in faith, hope and love.

Parishes with a chapel of reservation with separate entrance may offer longer, perhaps continuous adoration.

## Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

**Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament**, in contrast to adoration, refers to the ritual, the public display of the Blessed Sacrament in either a monstrance or a ciborium. It is part of a liturgical rite. Therefore, the directives for exposition are explicit and outlined in the *Roman Ritual: Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass (HCWEOM, nos. 82-100)*, as well as in liturgical directives, and in instructions from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The clear intention of these documents is that **exposition has a beginning and an end**. By its very nature, it is not perpetual. According to *HCWEOM*, no.95, exposition should involve music, reading(s) from Sacred Scripture, preaching, intercessory prayer, time for private prayer/adoration, and conclude with a special blessing of the faithful. Liturgy of the Hours may be celebrated, or the Rosary may be prayed.

*HCWEOM* permits and encourages that the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament take place in churches or oratories where the Eucharist is regularly reserved. There are three allowances for such expositions:

### **1. Solemn Exposition**

The Church has always sought a balanced and full understanding of the Eucharist. For this reason, she has carefully regulated the solemn exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Solemn Exposition of Forty Hours began in 1592 in Rome. Today, the Ritual recommends that solemn exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for an extended period of time **should take place once a year**. (*HCWEOM*, no. 86). Such an annual event allows a parish community the opportunity to meditate more deeply on the mystery of the Eucharist, to adore the Lord, and to grow in holiness in their relationship with the Lord and as a community. Parishes could connect these annual celebrations to the solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ or perhaps to the anniversary of the parish's founding. In this way, the devotion would take into account the liturgical season, be in accord with the liturgy, and lead the people back to the liturgy (*HCWEOM*, no. 79).

Careful preparation must be part of this type of annual solemn exposition. According to the liturgical norms, exposition of this kind **may take place only if** the parish ensures the continuous participation of a **reasonable number of the faithful** (at least two), that the **local Ordinary consents**, and that **they follow the established norms** (*Eucharisticum Mysterium [EM]*, no. 63; *HCWEOM*, no. 86). Since exposition is an official rite of the church, this extended period is to include readings from Sacred Scripture, hymns, preaching, intercessory prayer, and periods of silent prayer. Celebrating portions of the Liturgy of the Hours during this time is also appropriate and encouraged. *The Order for the Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist (OSEHE)* was published specifically as a collection of rites and texts to be used during annual solemn exposition.

During annual solemn exposition, **the celebration of Mass in the body of the church is prohibited.** If exposition is occurring in a chapel separate from the main body of the church, Mass may take place in the church; however, at least some of the faithful must remain in adoration. If the chapel is connected to the church, then the sacrament must be placed in the tabernacle during Mass.

The Blessed Sacrament exposed **must never be left alone** (*EM*, nos. 63 & 65; *NC WEOM*, no. 90; *CODE OF CANON LAW*, no. 942-943).

## **2. Scheduled Periods of Exposition**

The Church gives allowance for brief periods of exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, perhaps on a monthly or weekly basis for a fixed period of time. The Church also allows longer periods of continuous exposition "where the faithful assemble in large numbers (no.87). Because the Eucharist is being exposed in a monstrance or ciborium, it is a ritual of the Church and the **directives of HCWEOM** (nos. 93-100) and **the liturgical norms established by the Church are to be strictly followed.**

**Exposition for the sake of only giving benediction is prohibited** (*EM*, no. 66; *HCWEOM*, no. 89).

## **3. Perpetual Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament**

The Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments distinguished between perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle, and exposed in a ciborium or monstrance. In the former case, no permission is necessary. In the latter case, perpetual exposition, **permission of the local Ordinary is required.** The latter is permitted in **religious communities** and **pious associations with official recognition.** The Bishop alone determines the pastoral appropriateness of perpetual exposition in his diocese and, accordingly, may or may not permit it and may limit the number of places where it takes place.

The general understanding of the Church is that this type of exposition is not to be the normal and continuous pattern in a parish. Parishes seeking permission must petition the Bishop, show good reason for its need and guarantee compliance with all the pertinent general norms of the Church and applicable Diocesan policies. They also will need to show that they have attended to the primary form of Eucharistic activity—Sunday Eucharist.

## **Requirements for Adoration and Exposition**

**"The Most Holy Eucharist is to be reserved in only one tabernacle of a church or oratory.** (Canon 938.§1). If the Blessed Sacrament chapel is connected to the church, the Eucharist may be reserved only there and not also in the body of the church. Nor may it be reserved in another building of the parish, unless it be another sacred place at some distance from the main church"

1. **Reservation** may only take place in a church, oratory or chapel legitimately erected. Reservation outside of these places, even in a room of a rectory or convent, is forbidden.
2. **Permission** must be obtained from the bishop before a parish implements any plans for perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament exposed.
3. Measures of **safety** must be in place for adoration, especially at night.
4. **Minister** of exposition and reposition:
  - normally a priest or deacon (he alone may give a blessing with the sacrament).
  - a Eucharistic Minister of Holy Communion.
  - a member of a religious community or recognized pious association.
5. A single **genuflection** is made whether the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the tabernacle or exposed
6. **Number of adorers:**
  - in front of the tabernacle - unlimited
  - with exposition - two or more must be scheduled

N.B. In compliance with our Diocesan requirements for providing a safe environment for minors, no one under 18 may participate in adoration without the presence of one parent or at least two adults.
7. The Blessed Sacrament exposed **must never be left unattended.**
  - it may be reposed no more than twice in one day.
8. Number of **Candles** required:
  - Reservation in a tabernacle: 1 candle or oil lamp
  - Exposition in a ciborium: 2 candles
  - Exposition in a monstrance: 4 - 6 candles

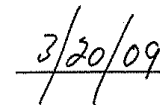
## Conclusion

For additional information or assistance with the norms and liturgical guidelines, contact the Office of Worship. These norms are also posted on the Worship Website, together with a list of resources that may be helpful.

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Most Reverend Francis X. DiLorenzo  
Bishop of Richmond