

In many ways, the practices and procedures of the Church that came about in response to the COVID pandemic have faded away. This is especially true in regards to the Mass and the ways in which we celebrate it. The Archdiocese of Cincinnati instituted a number of protocols in celebrating Mass in the midst of the pandemic and one of them was to suspend the distribution of the Precious Blood. While most of the other protocols that came about during the pandemic have been lifted, and in most ways we have returned to our pre-COVID practices, it is easily observable that the distribution of the Precious Blood from the chalice has not returned to pre-COVID practices here at St. Max. This is true in many parishes around the archdiocese, but it is also true that some parishes have brought back distribution from the chalice. Some parishioners have justifiably asked as to why that is. I would like to take some time to address that question and the many considerations that come into play.

First of all, to be absolutely clear, the fact that the distribution of the Precious Blood is not occurring now at St. Max is not out of any concern for viral transmissions or anything like that. While this all came about because of COVID, that is not the reason why we have not brought that practice back.

Secondly, as of Divine Mercy Sunday, 2022, the archdiocese lifted the prohibition on the distribution of the Precious Blood. However, it is important to note that the archbishop did not say that parishes had to resume the distribution from the chalice either. He left that decision to the pastor and the individual parish. This gave me the opportunity to take a closer look at this practice. I also asked our parish Worship Commission to dive more deeply into the liturgical documents of the Church so as to more fully understand how the Church envisioned the distribution of the Precious Blood. The idea was to pray, study, and discern what the Church asks and how we can and should adhere to those teachings.

So, the reasonable question is, why hasn't this practice returned to St. Max? Quite frankly, the initial reason was that we just did not have enough people volunteering as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC). St. Max is a big parish and it takes quite a lot of volunteers to cover the different roles at each liturgy. In the post-COVID era, many churches and organizations experienced a similar struggle. People just weren't volunteering like they were before. So, we were having a hard time finding enough people to cover the necessary number needed for distribution of the Hosts. In some ways, this continues to be a struggle. It is not uncommon that we find ourselves scrambling to find extra EMHC for different Masses. Adding the six to ten people at each Mass that would be needed to bring back the distribution of the chalice would be a challenge, to say the least.

While that is a more practical concern, there are other concerns that have arisen. One positive effect of the COVID-19 experience was that it gave us an opportunity to look at things with fresh eyes. As we faced difficult decisions, we could measure what is more important, what is necessary, what works well, and what might not work so well.

One of my highest priorities as a pastor is to help foster beautiful reverent liturgies and a fuller understanding of the Mass for parishioners. I firmly believe that if more Catholics had a deeper understanding and love for the Mass, lives would change. Often through no fault of their own, many Catholics have simply misunderstood the liturgy and why and how we celebrate it. Furthermore, many Catholics have also misunderstood what their role is in the Mass and what role the Mass should have in their lives. So, when it comes to decisions about the Mass, the question as to how certain actions or practices help people come to know and love the Mass is paramount. Does a practice increase our devotion to God? Does it elevate the reverence and solemnity of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass or diminish it? Does it pay due reverence to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament? These are all questions that come into play for me when evaluating any liturgical practices.

I want to stress that this time of reflection and discernment for me was not because I believed that we were doing things “wrong” at St. Max. Rather, I viewed this as an opportunity to be attentive to the most important work we do here at the parish. This question of the distribution of the Precious Blood has certainly weighed on my mind for quite a while, as there is much to contemplate, especially considering the great privilege we are given by receiving our Lord’s Body and Blood and offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. These are not areas in which decisions should come lightly or should be made simply because a practice is commonplace.

I also believe that in the post-Vatican II era, there has been a lot of confusion and sometimes even outright abuses in regards to the liturgy. Over the years, priests and liturgists have sometimes ignored the rubrics and liturgical guidelines of the Church. Instead, they have chosen to interpret passages of liturgical documents in ways that suit their own preferences rather than adjusting their preferences to meet the standards and guidelines set by the Church. Any one who was alive during the immediate years following Vatican II experienced this. Much of what the Mass was supposed to be and is got lost in efforts to make the Mass “contemporary” or “relatable.” While we should strive, of course, to engage people with vibrant and beautiful liturgies, the Mass is first and foremost a sacrificial prayer offered to God in which we are privileged to participate. It is the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ to His Father. We cannot lose sight of that through misguided efforts to make the Mass “hip” or “relatable.” Thankfully, the Church

offers us the rubrics and liturgical documents as guides and checkpoints to keep us centered on the gift of the Mass to our heavenly Father.

With all this in mind, and the question of the distribution of the Precious Blood, I would like to take a look at what the Church actually teaches about the distribution of the Precious Blood in the liturgical documents following Vatican II. It is also worth taking a brief excursion through the history of that practice within the Church, so as to give us a greater understanding of it. Let's begin with the history.

We will begin with the early Church, by that we mean the first three hundred years before the Edict of Milan brought Christianity out of hiding. Prior to the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D., Christianity was essentially an illegal and persecuted faith, so the faithful would have to gather in secret. Masses would be held in catacombs, caves, private homes, etc. There were not parishes, churches, and cathedrals as we know them today. There were not universal decrees for instructing the clergy and the faithful about the Mass and providing guidelines and rules for the liturgy. Even so, there were absolute universal practices and the overall structure of the liturgy was there. For example, the readings from Sacred Scripture, the offertory collection, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, among other things, were found universally in Masses. However, certain practices varied, such as how Holy Communion might be distributed. The point is that describing anything as *the* practice of the Church in the early days is difficult to do.

That being said, the distribution of the Precious Blood was common, but not necessarily universal.

Even from the earliest days there were circumstances in which the distribution of the Precious Blood was not practiced, for example, when Communion was brought to the homebound, when given to children, or on the celebration of the Good Friday liturgy. It was also quite common to distribute Communion through the practice of intinction, i.e., the dipping of the consecrated Host in the Precious Blood. Essentially, it was not out of the norm for Holy Communion even in the early Church to be distributed only with the Host.

What is of utmost importance, however, is that the Church taught quite firmly, as She still does, that anytime a person receives Holy Communion from only the Host or only the Precious Blood, that person is receiving the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus in full. A person does not need to receive both "species," as they are called, in order to receive the graces of Holy Communion. The Church teaches that receiving from only one or the other does not mean that we are receiving "less" Jesus. The theological term for this belief is concomitance, which means that the whole Christ is present in the Host

and the whole Christ is present in the Blood. Therefore if a person only receives the Precious Blood, he receives the whole Christ and, likewise, if a person only receives the Body of Christ through the Host, she receives the whole Christ. No one receives half of Jesus.

It is also important to note that the Church has never taught that receiving only the Host or only from the chalice somehow ignores Christ's precept to eat His Body and drink His Blood. Our Lord did indeed instruct us to do so, and the Church recognized immediately that we follow that instruction even when we may only receive one of the Eucharistic species because both are the Body and Blood of Jesus.

By the end of the first millennium of the Church. The distribution of the Precious Blood became less common. Why was this the case? Primarily, the practice was limited out of practical concerns for reverence. As the Church grew and the numbers of the faithful at Mass increased, the risk of spilling the Precious Blood became a concern. There were other concerns, as well, but the point is that the practice became less common.

By the fourteenth century the practice of distributing from the chalice was no longer permitted in the Latin Rite of the Roman Catholic Church (the eastern Rites have a very different method for the distribution of Holy Communion that I will not address here). Through the Council of Trent in the late sixteenth century, the Church confirmed the practice of distributing Holy Communion to the faithful only with the Host. The priest is the only person *required* to consume the Precious Blood. That practice remained the norm for hundreds of years. Essentially, the three basic provisions of Trent's teaching are that Communion under one kind is the "law" and the norm, that in receiving under one kind the faithful fully receive Christ; and that the Church has authority to determine how best the sacraments may be administered.

This practice changed with the liturgical reforms that followed the Second Vatican Council. In the 1963 document *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, the council document on the liturgy, the Council Fathers of Vatican II stated, "Communion under both kinds may be granted when the bishops think fit, not only to clerics and religious, but also to the laity, in cases to be determined by the Apostolic See, as, for instance, to the newly ordained in the Mass of their sacred ordination, to the newly professed in the Mass of their religious profession, and to the newly baptized in the Mass which follows their baptism." (No. 55.)

There are a few points to highlight and clarify from that passage. Notice that the decision as to whether Holy Communion is to be distributed under both kinds is left to the discretion of the bishop. The reintroduction of the distribution of Holy Communion under both

kinds was not a universal change meant to be applied from on high, but a decision left to the local Church. A bishop, if he so discerns, may cease the practice of the distribution from the chalice, as we saw during COVID. It is also worth noting that the Church does not seem to indicate that the Precious Blood should be distributed at *every* Mass, but, as we heard, “in cases to be determined by the Apostolic See, as, for instance, to the newly ordained in the Mass of their sacred ordination, to the newly professed in the Mass of their religious profession, and to the newly baptized in the Mass which follows their baptism.” It seems that the Church was promoting the idea of the faithful receiving from the chalice on special occasions. While the Council recognized the great symbolic value in receiving Holy Communion under both kinds, the Council Fathers also stressed that it was important for the faithful not to lose sight of the fact that Christ is present even in the smallest part of either the Host or Precious Blood.

Following the Council, there came a wide variety of responses to this practice throughout the world. In 1970, the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship allowed the individual conferences of bishops around the world to determine as to what extent, what situations, and what conditions Holy Communion could be received under both species. *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* had already listed several circumstances where Holy Communion under both species was permitted, for example, to the bride and groom at a wedding Mass or the reception of converts into the Church. In 1984, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States affirmed that the norms regarding the practice were left to the local bishop of each diocese. The most recent revision of *The General Instruction on the Roman Missal* further explains that “the diocesan Bishop is also given the faculty to permit Communion under both kinds whenever it may seem appropriate to the priest to whom, as its own shepherd, a community has been entrusted, provided that the faithful have been well instructed and there is no danger of profanation of the Sacrament or of the rite’s becoming difficult because of the large number of participants or some other reason.” (#283) In other words, as is the case in our archdiocese, the bishop may leave the decision to distribute from the chalice to the discretion of the pastor.

Whenever we are called to discern anything it is important to look at all sides. So, let us look at how the Church commends the practice of distributing from the chalice.

Let’s begin with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It states: “Since Christ is sacramentally present under each of the species, Communion under the species of bread alone makes it possible to receive all the fruit of Eucharistic grace. For pastoral reasons this manner of receiving Communion has been legitimately established as the most common form in the Latin rite. But ‘the sign of Communion is more complete when

given under both kinds, since in that form the sign of the Eucharistic meal appears more clearly.” (#1390)

*The General Instruction on the Roman Missal* teaches that “Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it is distributed under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clear expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the relationship between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Father’s Kingdom.” (#281) In other words, there is a rich symbolic value when receiving under both kinds that signifies the participation in the Lord’s Supper and in the Messianic Banquet. The Church is sure to clarify, however, “that Christ, whole and entire, and the true Sacrament, is received even under only one species, and consequently that as far as the effects are concerned, those who receive under only one species are not deprived of any of the grace that is necessary for salvation.” (#282)

In the 2011 document, *Doctrinal Formation and Communion Under Both Kinds*, we read, “The purpose, then, of receiving holy Communion under both kinds, is not that the faithful receive more grace than when they receive it under one kind alone, but that the faithful are enabled to appreciate vividly the value of the sign. Sadly, this distinction has not always been made clear and some people, when not offered holy Communion under both kinds, have expressed a sense of bewilderment, even thwarted entitlement, or a feeling that holy Communion under one kind alone was, to some extent, deficient.”

Returning to *The General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, the Church actually specifies occasions in which Communion under both kinds is permitted, such as “for priests who are not able to celebrate or concelebrate Mass, for the deacon and others who perform some duty at the Mass, and for members of communities at the conventual Mass or ‘community’ Mass, along with seminarians, and all who are engaged in a retreat or are taking part in a spiritual or pastoral gathering.” (#283)

Another important document that speaks to this topic is *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (*Sacrament of Redemption*) promulgated in 2004. The document states the following, “So that the fullness of the sign may be made more clearly evident to the faithful in the course of the Eucharistic banquet, lay members of Christ’s faithful, too, are admitted to Communion under both kinds, in the cases set forth in the liturgical books, preceded, and continually accompanied by proper catechesis regarding the dogmatic principles on this matter laid down by the Ecumenical Council of Trent.” (#100)

The document goes on to say that “in order for Holy Communion under both kinds to be administered to the lay members of Christ’s faithful, due consideration should be given to the circumstances, as judged first of all by the diocesan Bishop. It is to be completely excluded where even a small danger exists of the sacred species being profaned.” (#101) It specifies certain conditions in which caution should be taken in deciding as to distribute from the chalice or not, explaining that “the chalice should not be ministered to lay members of Christ’s faithful where there is such a large number of communicants that it is difficult to gauge the amount of wine for the Eucharist and there is a danger that ‘more than a reasonable quantity of the Blood of Christ remain to be consumed at the end of the celebration.’” (#102)

All of this information, lengthy and occasionally complicated as it may be, essentially boils down to the situation that the distribution of the Precious Blood is a commendable and salutary practice, but is one that requires catechesis, as well as vigilant reverence. It is also left to the discretion of the pastor.

Overall, it seems that the documents do not envision that the reception of the Precious Blood by the laity is necessarily meant to be the every day, regular practice, but is rather a practice that involves a good deal of discretion given the local circumstances. The Church also definitively encourages that this practice should be regulated by not only practical decisions, but also with a strong emphasis on maintaining the dignity and reverence due to the sacred Precious Blood of Jesus.

I feel it is necessary to add one other consideration, and that is the status of those with gluten intolerance. Since the distribution of the chalice ceased, many people who have health conditions that prevent or limit their access to gluten have therefore had limited access to Holy Communion in general. That should not continue.

With all of this in mind, and after consulting with our parish Worship Commission, liturgical experts, some of my brother priests and fellow pastors, and after much study, thought and prayer, here is how the distribution of the Precious Blood shall be practiced here at St. Max.

Beginning the weekend of January 28-29, a chalice will be available at all of our weekend Masses for those who have a gluten intolerance.

In order to participate in the elevated solemnity that distribution under both kinds brings about and to be that fuller sign of the participation in the Messianic Banquet, we will distribute the Precious Blood on the following solemnities and liturgical occasions:

- ◆ January 1, The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
- ◆ The Mass of the Lord's Supper (Holy Thursday)
- ◆ The Easter Vigil
- ◆ Pentecost
- ◆ The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus (Corpus Christi)
- ◆ The Feast of St. Maximilian Kolbe (Celebrate St. Max Weekend)
- ◆ The Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15)
- ◆ The month of July is traditionally set aside as the "Month of the Precious Blood," so we will distribute from the chalice on the weekend Masses of July.
- ◆ All Saints Day (November 1)
- ◆ The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe
- ◆ The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (December 8)

Those making their First Holy Communion will receive the Holy Eucharist under both kinds.

The Precious Blood will not be distributed at daily Masses, funerals or weddings.

As I stated at the beginning of this document, any decisions I make regarding the way in which we celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass here at St. Max are guided by the norms and directives of the Church and by an effort to foster greater reverence and devotion to the Eucharist. We are a large parish. That necessitates a large number of ministers to serve at Mass. It is difficult, in my mind, to maintain an air of solemnity and reverence when large numbers of people are streaming in and out of the sanctuary. That amount of movement can very distracting. Additionally, we struggle to find enough Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion as it is. Potentially doubling the number of needed ministers at every Mass could be a challenge indeed.

An additional concern that came about in the time before COVID when we had as many as sixteen chalices at a Mass was the difficulty in gauging the amount of wine to be allotted to the chalices. Too little wine led to frustration for those who could not receive because the Precious Blood had run out. Too much wine led to the problem of how to handle the excess amount of Precious Blood. Unlike the Hosts, the Precious Blood may not be reserved in the Tabernacle. Therefore, It must be consumed at the Mass. The practice of consuming multiple chalices of the Precious Blood at the altar certainly does not add to the dignity or solemnity of the Mass.



The point of sharing all of this with you is that I wanted to be as transparent as possible and also demonstrate that this decision did not come about lightly. While I recognize some people will not agree with me on this issue and may in fact be quite frustrated by this decision, I also believe that this format allows those with gluten intolerance access to the Lord in the Eucharist, and regularly invites all of the faithful to receive from the chalice at Masses inviting greater solemnity as we celebrate the high feasts of our Church year.

It is also important to emphasize that these practices demonstrate the position of the Church that the distribution of the Precious Blood is more exceptional than normative, thus highlighting the doctrine of concomitance. In other words, our Lord comes to us under the appearance of bread and under the appearance of wine. He holds nothing back in that gift. How privileged we are to receive Him. A privilege we should recognize with awe, humility, and reverence.

Pertinent Documents for your own review:

*Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1390*

*General Instruction of the Roman Missal, #281-287*

*Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America, #17-21, 23-24*

*Redemptionis Sacramentum, #100-107*

*Sacrosanctum Concilium, #55*

*Doctrinal Formation and Communion Under Both Kinds*

*The Code of Canon Law, # 925*