

**AN OVERVIEW OF  
HOLY COMMUNION AND WORSHIP OF THE EUCHARISTIC MYSTERY OUTSIDE MASS**

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**“Care should be taken that...worship of the Most Blessed Sacrament  
should shed light on the relationship that it has with the Mass”**

*Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery Outside Mass, no. 82*

## **INTRODUCTION**

*Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery Outside Mass* (henceforth, HCWEMOM) is the ritual text that provides the rites, prayers, and rubrics for liturgical celebrations with the Blessed Sacrament that are not part of a Eucharistic celebration – Mass.

HCWEMOM is the most recent ritual text to be updated after changes to the rules for liturgical translations and adaptations as directed by *Liturgiam authenticam* (2001) and, later, *Magnum principium* (2017). This new edition is a revision of the English translation that has been used in the United States since 1973. The use of the new translation became mandatory in the dioceses of the United States on September 14, 2024.

### **A Cultural Context—the Pandemic of 2020 and the Eucharistic Revival**

Why this update, and why now? Although this revision was one of a series of liturgical texts that have been newly-translated, its release feels particularly resonant now. Work on this update was under way at an important time in the life of the Church, as a global pandemic forced all Catholics to “participate” in the Sunday liturgy via livestream, on television or computer screens, thereby confronting us with the importance of our physical presence at Mass and the reality of the Real Presence in our lives. As churches were closed to avoid spreading the Covid virus, a profound shift occurred in the way Catholics were able to fulfill that crucial mandate of the Council: the full, conscious and active participation in the Mass (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14). Catholics were forced to recall and examine the salvific, transformational, and communal action of the Eucharistic celebration precisely because they could not experience it.

Add to this the fact that, as churches remained closed Sunday after Sunday, some communities exposed the Blessed Sacrament through various means as a way to provide Catholics with some form of encounter with the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. And so, a conversation arose regarding the value of actually being *present at Mass*, versus being *in the presence of* the Eucharistic species.

At the same time, there was a growing demand for Communion to the Sick, as Covid numbers grew, hospitals and nursing homes overflowed, and even clergy were denied access to the sick and dying.

In the United States, the pandemic was followed closely by the Eucharistic Revival project of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), an attempt, as envisioned by the Bishops, to correct

any mistaken impression among the Catholic faithful that the Eucharistic species was anything other than the Real Presence of Christ—Body, Blood, soul and divinity—under the appearance of the bread and wine brought to the altar. Of necessity, many of the rituals surrounding this initiative in which the people took part were those of exposition and adoration—Holy Hours became more and more common as the country took part in the revival initiative. In addition, by the USCCB's estimation, some 200,000 Catholics took part in some form of procession during the Eucharistic Revival in the summer of 2024.

Both of these occurrences heightened in Catholics an awareness of and interest in the rites included in HCWEMOM.

### **The Relationship between Adoration and the Mass**

While some words in the new translation have changed, one major premise has not. The Church clearly instructs that all of these rites emanate *from* the celebration of Mass itself! And the purpose of the rites for worship of the Eucharist outside Mass is to lead the faithful *back to* the celebration of Mass.

The Introduction to both the old and new translations quotes the *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, no. 5: "...the other Sacraments, as also all the ministries of the Church, and the works of the apostolate, are united with the Holy Eucharist and are directed toward it. For in the Most Holy Eucharist is contained all the spiritual wealth of the Church..." And similarly, from the *Instruction on Eucharistic Worship*, no. 3e: "the celebration of the Eucharist in the Sacrifice of the Mass is truly the origin and purpose of the worship that is shown to the Eucharist outside Mass."

The introduction in HCWEMOM is explicit. The sacrament is "reserved after Mass to extend the grace of the Sacrifice" (HCWEMOM, no. 4). These rites are not substitutions for Mass; they exist to allow the faithful to comprehend more fully the Eucharistic mystery as manifested in the celebration of Mass.

As the faithful are reintroduced to and reflect on these rituals, then, it is, hopefully, inevitable that they will also reflect on the way that Mass is celebrated in their community.

### **Questions for reflection:**

1. What was Covid like in your community? How did the experience of closed parishes change your perception of parish life for you? What did you miss about not being able to attend Mass? Did you livestream liturgies on Sunday? If yes, was it your local parish liturgy or one from a different parish? Why did you choose one over the other?
2. Did you take part in the Eucharistic Revival? What was the fruit of that experience for you? Why do you think so many communities celebrated this revival with a Holy Hour as opposed to Mass?



This article was adapted from an original prepared for the Diocese of Boise. It has been generously shared with the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions. Ms. O'Hagan serves on its Board of Directors.

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# HOLY COMMUNION AND WORSHIP OF THE EUCHARISTIC MYSTERY OUTSIDE MASS

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## THE INTRODUCTION TO HCWEMOM

The Introduction includes paragraphs on the purpose of the reservation of the Eucharist -- primarily for Viaticum, then for Communion to the Sick, and finally for adoration. These are, more or less, unchanged from the 1973 translation.

It describes the place of reservation of the Blessed Sacrament in churches. It includes an instruction to avoid reservation of the Eucharist “on or near” the altar where Mass is being celebrated; the necessity of keeping open for prayer those places where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, at given hours every day; and the nature and materials of tabernacles and their appurtenances in order to ensure the Blessed Sacrament is safe from profanation and clearly identifiable as such to the faithful.

It elaborates on the competence of each episcopal conference to adapt the text of *HCWEMOM* for their region. The paragraphs regarding the bishops’ conference remain largely unchanged.

What’s new? As with all the most recent liturgical translations, the text in this new translation of *HCWEMOM* reflects the newer principles of translation that calls for a more faithful rendering of the Latin typical text into the language of the conference—in this case, English. Most of the differences between the old and new texts can be attributed to this.

Along these lines, one small but notable change occurs in paragraph six of the Introduction, regarding the chief ways that Christ is present in the Mass. The old text of the English translation reads that Christ is present “finally and above all in the eucharistic sacrament,” which the new English text replaces with, “...in the Eucharistic species.” This switch from “sacrament” to “species” occurs elsewhere and is simply the result of a more careful translation following new translation norms—in the Latin (typical) text, the word has always been “species.” It may be fruitful for communities to engage with this word difference. The various terms for the Eucharist do have various theological and doctrinal ideas depending on what one is talking about (e.g., “Blessed Sacrament,” “host,” and “Jesus,” etc.).

### Questions for reflection:

1. What are some common terms the faithful in your community use when referring to the consecrated host in a monstrance during Exposition? Do they say, “Jesus,” “the Blessed Sacrament,” or something else? Is it different from how they refer to the Eucharistic species at Mass? Without judgement, what might these different terms say about an individual’s understanding of the Real Presence?
2. Does your parish have regular daily hours for exposition? If not, why not? Would such a thing be practical? Do you have trained, delegated ministers or enough participants to fulfill the document’s guidelines for participation in exposition?
3. How might a regular practice of exposition highlight the role of the Eucharistic liturgy in the lives of the faithful? What formation might be done around such a practice to refocus the faithful on participation in Mass?

## CHAPTER ONE: HOLY COMMUNION OUTSIDE MASS

This chapter begins, “Sacramental Communion received within Mass is the more perfect participation in the Eucharistic Celebration. The Eucharistic sign is expressed more clearly, when the faithful receive the Body of the Lord after the Communion of the Priest, from the same Sacrifice. Therefore, recently made bread should be consecrated in every Eucharistic Celebration for the Communion of the faithful” (no. 13). This imperative has its source in no less a document than *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (no. 55), is repeated in *The Roman Missa* (GIRM 85), and is further stated here. The introduction to this chapter goes on to say that priests should not refuse Communion to the faithful who “for a just cause seek it, even outside Mass.” (The language “for a just cause” is new to this second edition.)

There is tension here. The tabernacle is *not* the place to house vast amounts of consecrated hosts for distribution to the faithful at Communion during Mass; the tabernacle should hold only enough consecrated hosts to be reserved for those who wish to receive Communion outside of Mass.

With no major changes, the ritual text outlines the times and days Communion may be distributed outside Mass (to the sick on any day except Holy Saturday; on that day, only Viaticum is permitted).

The ministers of Holy Communion and the place for its distribution remain the same in the updated text. Section V outlines the norms for giving Communion (“regulations” in the older text). These norms are unchanged between the two translations. Here will be found directives regarding cloths, corporals, and candles; vesture; and the words and postures/gestures to be used by the minister and the communicant. Finally, the disposition of the communicant is addressed.

The bulk of Chapter I is taken up by the outline of the ritual, and words and rubrics for ministers and people. It carefully distinguishes between the more generic “minister” and “priest or deacon,” as the words and actions for laity versus clergy are distinct.

What’s new? Again, due to the change in translation principles, the prayers and greetings of the service are quite different, so any binders that ministers may have used during these celebrations should be fully updated using the new text.

One minor change in the norms of this chapter is the removal of a specific time for which the faithful must fast if they are old, infirm, or otherwise unable to fast for the full required hour before reception of Communion. The old text specified “at least a quarter of an hour” of fasting before Communion for these; the new text says that these and their caretakers may receive Communion even if they have consumed food or drink within the hour before reception.

In the new ritual, optional texts for the introductory rites of this service are found elsewhere than in the main outline (see Chapter IV for various texts).

The 2024 edition provides an entire ritual before including a shorter version of the rite. The old text included the shorter version before going on to outline the rest of the service—in effect, the old text bounced from number 29 to number 44, then back to number 30. The new text is cleaner and easier to follow.

### Questions for reflection:

1. Does your community hold regular Communion services? If yes, do these take place within the Liturgy of the Hours, or within a celebration of the Word? Do these services follow the guidelines laid out in HCWEMOM? What conditions in your parish must be met before a communion service is held? Who normally leads these?

2. How does your experience of a Communion service differ from that of Mass? Does one seem better prepared than the other? What kinds of formation does your parish do around the distinction between Mass and a Communion service?

## **CHAPTER II: COMMUNION AND VIATICUM BY AN EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER**

Both the old and new edition direct Priests and Deacons to follow the ritual book *The Order of Anointing of the Sick and of their Pastoral Care*. Both editions also give directions on how to properly bring Communion in the species of wine to those who cannot receive the species of bread.

The outline for this ritual then follows. There is a line in both texts allowing others present to receive Communion, after the sick person receives. In Chapter II, the shorter rite for this service is in the same place in both editions—immediately following the conclusion of the longer rite. It outlines a possible process for a place like a hospital or nursing home, where there may be several different rooms to be visited by the minister.

The third section in Chapter II covers the rites for Viaticum. Again, some minor changes in wording (“friendly” to “warmly,” “litany” to “prayer”) may warrant additional study, if only to force a deeper consideration of this rite and its audience. In both translations, there are several places in the text where the condition of the communicant may dictate a different or shorter approach. The entire rite concludes with a Sign of Peace offered *to the sick person*.

What’s new in Chapter II? The language is updated as in the other sections of this book. Prayers, greetings, and the like are significantly changed according to new translation norms. As above, the alternate texts in the new book are provided in Chapter IV.

### **Questions for reflection:**

1. How does the experience of Viaticum differ from other, more regular visits to the sick? What is stressed in the rites for Viaticum?

## **CHAPTER III: VARIOUS FORMS OF WORSHIP OF THE MOST HOLY EUCHARIST**

To begin, this chapter reiterates the importance of following the directives as prescribed by the Church for this form of worship. Many Catholics are unaware that there *are* rubrics surrounding practices such as exposition, so practices have proliferated that are absolutely outside the bounds of what the Church envisions. Those in charge of overseeing Holy Hours and other rites of exposition would do well to study carefully this particular chapter. Also, the text here instructs the faithful to pay attention to the liturgical season so that the worship service harmonizes with the Church’s sacred liturgy, leading the faithful, as always, to the relationship with the Mass.

### **Exposition of the Most Holy Eucharist**

The first section of this chapter, “Exposition of the Most Holy Eucharist,” remains largely the same from the older text to the newer, and begins with an introduction to this service that includes further instruction on the relationship between Mass and exposition, followed by regulations (“Points to be Observed,” in the new translation), and considerations for when exposition will continue over a considerable length of time.

Prohibitions remain against celebrating Mass during Exposition (although the language in the newer text appears more specific). The old text prohibited Mass “in the body of the Church.” The newer

translation's wording is, "in the *same* part of the church." The reason for this prohibition is the same—exposition is an adumbration of the more perfect expression of the Eucharistic Mystery that is found in the Mass and therefore should not be in competition with Mass.

The text encourages exposition at least once a year in churches where the Eucharist is regularly reserved, and it provides directions on postures, preparation, and expectations regarding attendance at the service. These are found in numbers 84-89 and are perhaps the most unexamined rubrics for exposition; parish leaders should take this opportunity to be sure their community's practices are proper and reverent. Events such as twenty-four-hour exposition should not take place if the faithful are not able to be present in the numbers and with the continuity required by the document. The introduction concludes with directions for religious communities and instructions for the leader of the service. The Order for Exposition then follows. This is largely the same in both texts.

### **Eucharistic Processions**

HCWEMOM stresses that when "the Eucharist is carried through streets in a solemn rite with singing, the Christian people bear public witness of faith and devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament" (101). Thus it is not envisioned that a procession takes place within the walls of the church.

The Diocesan Bishop has the authority to judge the "circumstances of today" and to discern the time, place, and arrangement of procession so "that they may be conducted with dignity and without harm to the reverence due to this Most Blessed Sacrament" (ibid.).

The rite especially recommends processions on the solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (102).

At the end of the procession, the Blessed Sacrament is reposed.

### **Eucharistic Congresses**

This section of Chapter III addresses the idea of a Eucharistic Congress. A Bishop may convene these. The rite envisions a multi-day event with the local church and other churches that includes prayer and study. "These studies should lead to the consideration of genuine needs and should foster the progress of theological study and the good of the local Church. In these inquiries, the assistance of experts in theological, biblical liturgical, and pastoral matters, as well as the human sciences should be employed" (110).

Preparations for the Congress include a thorough catechesis of the Eucharist suited to the capacity of various groups; more active participation in the Mass; and "the study of resources and implementation of social works for the sake of human development and the right distribution of good..." (111). There is usually a strong emphasis on social justice issues.

The congress should include Mass – "...the celebration of the Eucharist should truly be the center and summit to which all the undertakings of various forms of piety should be directed" (112). It should also include celebrations of the word of God, catechetical sessions, public conferences, opportunities for extended adoration in various churches, and a Eucharistic procession through the streets (cf. 112).

What's new in Chapter III? The Order for Exposition includes the full text of hymns that may be used during the liturgy. The previous translation suggested hymns but did not include them. This is useful; communities have come to expect hymns such as "*O Salutaris Hostia*" and "*Tantum Ergo*" (both are included in the new translation but not in the previous).

The new text includes a detail for the minister regarding the conclusion to Exposition during Morning or Evening Prayer that was left out of the previous text.

As elsewhere, optional prayers are removed from the order itself and placed in Chapter IV.

This new translation includes the Divine Praises (“Blessed be God...”) after the blessing of the people with the Blessed Sacrament (Benediction); this prayer is also in keeping with a longstanding custom, and its inclusion adds clarity that many communities will appreciate.

#### **Questions for reflection:**

1. What does a Holy Hour look like in your community? Are these well-attended?
2. Do you regularly celebrate the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ with a Eucharistic procession?
3. Are there ethnic groups or cultures in your community that might (or already do) tie special observances or meaningful feast days into a particular practice of adoration, procession, or the like? How do their traditions get incorporated into these practices?

#### **CHAPTER IV: VARIOUS TEXT FOR DISTRIBUTION AND ADORATION/PROCESSIONS**

This section includes the options for readings, antiphons, hymns, and prayers to be used in the various rites. The primary difference is again in the translation of the texts. Also, the new text includes a selection of hymns, where the old text does not.

#### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

“In preparing exposition, everything should be carefully avoided which might in any way obscure the desire of Christ...that he might be close to us as food, medicine, and comfort” (*HCWEMOM*, no. 82).

Again, there may be tension between the way in which we approach Eucharistic adoration and in the Church’s desire, stated above, that Christ be close to us through these rituals. We must at once show the reverence and care due to the Blessed Sacrament yet never elevate our practices to a point that removes Christ from our daily lives and needs. But tension may be fruitful. Through exposing the Blessed Sacrament for worship, we may probe more deeply into the mystery of the Lord’s Presence as we commit to living out his Gospel with our own body, mind, and soul. Relying on this relationship with Christ, “food, medicine, and comfort,” the people may then live in a way that reflects their faith in his Paschal Mystery, which they enter by way of their baptism and in a particular way at every liturgy. And so Eucharistic worship fulfills its purpose: drawing upon the grace of the Eucharistic sacrifice, it strengthens Christian disciples to further Christ’s work in the world.

#### **Final questions for reflection:**

1. What do you think Catholics get right (or wrong) about their understanding of the theology of the Real Presence as expressed in the way we celebrate the rituals set forth in this text? How can this theology be fruitfully formed using the rites in this book? What is your typical experience, if any, of any of these practices? Are they done well? Where can improvements be made in the way your community celebrates these?
2. St. Gerard Majella said, “The Most Blessed Sacrament is Christ made invisible. The poor sick person is Christ again made visible.” What does this mean to you? How does it apply to the rituals of *HCWEMOM*, especially in the way the ritual of Communion to the Sick and that of Exposition engage with the faithful and with each other?