



OFFICE OF SACRED LITURGY * DIOCESE OF BIRMINGHAM IN ALABAMA
P.O. Box 12047 * Birmingham, AL 35202 * 205-838-8322 * sacredliturgy@bhmdiocese.org

LITURGICAL NORMS FOR EUCHARISTIC PROCESSIONS

In processions in which the Eucharist is carried through the streets solemnly with singing, especially on the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Christian people give public witness to their faith and their devotion toward this sacrament. However, it is for the local Ordinary to decide on both the advisability of such processions in today's conditions and on a place and plan for them that will ensure their being carried out with decorum and without any loss of reverence toward this sacrament.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approved ritual book, *Order for the Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist: Presider's Edition* [OSEHE], provides additional clarity:

1. Processions within the body of a church are no longer permitted [Notitiae 11 (1975, 64)]. A procession with the Blessed Sacrament should go from one church to another. Nevertheless, if local circumstances require, the procession may return to the same church where it began [HCWEOM, no. 107]. An obvious exception to this norm would be on Holy Thursday when an altar of repose has been erected in another part of the same church.

During the procession there may be stations where the eucharistic blessing is given, if there is such a custom and some pastoral advantage recommends it. Songs and prayers should be planned with the purpose of expressing the faith of the participants and centering their attention on the Lord alone [Notitiae 4 (1968, 133-134)].

Liturgical Norms in the Diocese of Birmingham

1. This procession is Liturgy in the formal sense, a *liturgical* act of walking with the Lord.
2. Since a solemn procession gives public witness, great care is to be taken in planning and preparation.
3. Singing is a necessary part of the procession.
 - Hymns and through-composed songs are difficult to maintain in a long procession.
 - The choir can more easily maintain tempo and pitch when they stand and walk together. But they are hard to hear by those farther back in the procession.
 - Spreading musicians two-by-two throughout the procession creates its own difficulties making it more difficult for musicians to hear other musicians.

- Singing an un-memorized text off a song sheet while walking is also difficult. **Familiar refrains, antiphons, and acclamations are easier to maintain in procession.**
 - “Walkable” instruments are often very effective: the sounds of hand bells and drums carry well and will help maintain both pitch and tempo.
 - Some silence is also fitting.
4. Other ways of suitable praying may also take place as long as it is focused on the Lord [HCWEOM, no. 107 and OSEHE, no. 21].
 5. Bishop Raica encourages and gives permission to pastors to conduct processions especially on the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ and at particular strategic points during the Eucharistic Revival.
 6. Suitable arrangements are always to be made with public authorities and local law enforcement officials.
 7. In towns and cities with more than one parish, pastors may wish to collaborate on a single joint procession. This may easily accommodate the Church’s desire for “the procession to go from one church to another” whenever possible [HCWEOM, no. 107 and OSEHE, no. 20].
 8. It is ideal that Mass of the day immediately precedes the procession. At the end of Holy Communion, the monstrance is prepared and placed on the altar. All may sit for the usual brief silence. A Song of Praise may then be sung. The Prayer after Communion is prayed in the usual way. The Sacrament is incensed and the procession begins.
 9. Alternately, at the end of Communion, a period of lengthy Adoration of the Holy Eucharist may begin after the Prayer after Communion with the procession following it at a later published time. This may be helpful to accommodate the needs of a neighboring parish or for public safety.
 10. The custom of stopping at stations for the giving of a Eucharistic blessing is not required but may take place as per the norms in HCWEOM, no. 104.
 11. An advantage for stopping at stations is that a worship aid with songs and other prayers may more easily be used while the assembly is standing.
 - Prepare in advance that all may hear by how the assembly is gathered at the station and by use of a sound system if that is possible.
 - The songs and prayers should focus on Jesus Christ the Lord alone.
 - There may a reading with some brief preaching on an aspect of the Eucharistic presence and mystery.
 - The Eucharistic blessing may be given. It is not required at the station(s) especially if all in the procession continue into the church for Benediction at the end.
 12. A procession is not permitted to remain inside the church building [OSEHE, no. 20].
 13. A canopy (baldachin) is not required but may be according to local custom.
 14. This following order of procession may help parish planning:
 - Crossbearer, accompanied by candlebearers

- Clergy wearing copes, alb/surplice and stole or vestments for Mass if the procession immediately follows
- Deacon of the Mass
- Censerbearer with burning incense
- Priest carrying the Blessed Sacrament [walking under a canopy if it is used] and accompanied by torchbearers
- The faithful [optionally carrying lighted candles]
- Suitable banners and musical instruments may follow in procession

Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament as a Liturgical Act

Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament is not strictly a devotional act. Rather, it is a liturgical act and is therefore governed by established liturgical norms. No. 104 of *Eucharistiae Sacramentum* notes that” ...in the course of the procession there *may be stations* where the eucharistic blessing is given, if there is such a custom and some pastoral advantage recommends it.

Therefore, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament is only ever to be given to the whole body of the faithful from an altar which has been arranged beforehand and can be accomplished in accordance with the liturgical norms.

The practice of “individual benediction” whereby the monstrance approaches as blesses persons individually is not ever appropriate- just as it is not ever appropriate to bless one who comes forward in the Communion procession with the sacred host.