

## Question on Holy Communion

### *“Living the Mystery”*

Fr. Augie Gothman

I recently got a note asking this question: “Father Augie, I am an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion and have been for many years. Recently, my pastor mentioned that before long we (Extraordinary Ministers) will not be purifying the chalices as we did some years ago. Tell me again the reasoning for this, please?”

**To answer we need to do a little bit of history, and clarify a couple of terms.**

**Remember, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council recommended the distribution of Holy Communion under Both Kinds.** Their decision in 1963 to restore Holy Communion under both kinds at the bishop's discretion took expression in the first edition (1970) of the Roman Missal and enjoys an even more generous application in the third typical edition of the Roman Missal (2002): *Holy Communion has a more complete form as a sign when it is received under both kinds. For in this manner of reception a fuller sign of the Eucharistic banquet shines forth. Moreover there is a clearer expression of that will by which the new and everlasting covenant is ratified in the blood of the Lord and of the relationship of the Eucharistic banquet to the eschatological banquet in the Father's kingdom. (General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) 2002: 281)*

Recall that ‘ordinary’ ministers of Holy Communion include bishops, priests, and deacons. Other ‘extraordinary’ ministers can be appointed and used if there are not enough ordinary ministers (lay faithful designated by the bishop, and “instituted acolytes”—usually seminarians or candidates for the diaconate.)

**Reverence for the Blessed Sacrament is paramount.** After communion, the deacon (if present) returns to the altar with the priest and consume any remaining fragments of the Body of Christ. The remaining consecrated bread is reserved in the tabernacle by an ordinary or an extraordinary minister. (see GIRM 2002: 163, 182, 183, 247, 279.)

The Blood of Christ is consumed completely by the priest, deacon, instituted acolyte, or an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion. “When there are extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, they may consume what remains of the Precious Blood from their chalice of distribution with permission of the diocesan bishop.” (*Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds for the Dioceses of the United States of America*, #52) If necessary, they are assisted by other ordinary or extraordinary ministers.

**Pastors and the ordained have a special duty to safeguard the Blessed Sacrament.** Configured as “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1) they are charged to ensure reverent handling of even small amounts of the Eucharist. That is, vessels are purified by the priest, deacon, or instituted acolyte after communion or after Mass, as far as possible at the credence table. Paten(s) are usually wiped clean with a

purificator. The purification of the chalice(s) is done with water that is then drunk by whoever does the purification. The one purifying the vessels prays, "Lord, may I receive these gifts in purity of heart. May they bring me healing and strength now and forever." The purification should be performed with reverence, though briefly and inconspicuously. If there are several vessels, their purification is preferably left until after Mass. It is permitted to place the vessels that need to be purified, suitably covered with purificator(s), at the credence table on a corporal and to purify them immediately after Mass following the dismissal of the people.

I hope this helps clarify things for my note-writer and for all those others who wonder.