

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

In the weeks to come, your parish bulletin will carry explanations of the Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, along with some instructions on how we are to celebrate these sacraments as God's Holy People in the Archdiocese of Chicago. I always enjoy worshiping God with you when I celebrate Mass in the parishes and institutions of the Archdiocese, and I hope now for a moment of renewal in our worship.

As you know, the sacraments are acts of faith. We believe that the risen Christ acts through the sacraments. He gives us grace, which brings us into his own life here and in the life to come.

The sacraments are acts of the Church. The Church knows what Christ gives her the power to do, and it is the Church that puts order into the celebration of the sacraments. The Church, in the words of Vatican II, is a "hierarchical communion" gathered around Christ, our mediator with the Father. That reality shapes our worship. The royal priesthood of the baptized is made active in the Mass by the ministry of ordained priests, so that the Eucharist is the action of the whole Christ, made visible in head and members in his body, the Church.

The sacraments are rites. When the national anthem is played, everyone rises. That is a secular rite. The sacraments are rites of the faith community; they require common responses and actions. It is easier to respond since the liturgy was put into the vernacular, and most people do so with good voice. Likewise most people act together, for example, making the Sign of the Cross at the beginning of the Mass. We worship as a body, with various members taking different roles and functions, in an integrated pattern. Normally, we sit to listen, we stand out of respect, and we kneel to adore.

The Catholics of the Archdiocese of Chicago worship using the Roman rite, and the *Roman Missal* has recently been slightly revised. This revision necessitates a few changes in the way we worship together. These changes will be explained in the fall and will come into effect on the First Sunday of Advent, November 30, 2003. This revision does not affect celebrations of the Eucharist that use the Roman rite as it was done before the revisions called for by the Second Vatican Council. It also does not affect the worship of Catholics in Cook and Lake counties who belong to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church or to the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church or to the Maronite or other Eastern Catholic Churches, for these communities worship according to their own rites.

The explanations and instructions to follow are like a collective examination of conscience about the state of our worship. Our participation in worship should be deliberate or conscious, active, and fruitful. Sometimes we participate by acting and speaking, sometimes by silence and recollection. Participation is always conditioned by an interior disposition of faith, hope, and charity.

The charity that brings us to the Eucharist also brings us from the Eucharist into a world in need of love. Because we are one with Christ, it is his love that we are to bring to others. In the Archdiocese, we are talking more and more about sharing Christ's spiritual gifts, that is, evangelizing. The Eucharist both gives us the zeal to introduce others to Christ and is itself the greatest gift we are to share, for it is Christ himself. The Mass is the means by which God makes holy the world; it is the worship that the human race offers to the Father, adoring him through Christ in the Holy Spirit. It is the most important thing we do, the only thing we will do for all eternity. Thank you for all your efforts to do it well.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Francis Cardinal George, OMI
Archbishop of Chicago