

"I WILL LIFT UP THE CUP OF SALVATION..."

The Reformed Rite of the Blessing of Chalices

by

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In his exposition on Psalm 113 St. Augustine mentions that Christians use a number of utensils and vessels for the celebration of the Liturgy, made of silver, gold and other metals. Then he adds casually that these vessels are consecrated by their very use in the sacred rites; therefore they are called holy or sacred.¹ For centuries Rome seems to have followed the same practice.

Only under the influence of the Gallican Liturgy Rome established special rites for the consecration of patens and chalices. The *Missale Francorum*² and the *Old Gelasian Sacramentary*,³ both of the early eighth century, contain the oldest Latin blessing of a chalice and paten. From then on through the centuries we can trace special rites for the same purpose. We find them in the appendix to the *Gregorian Sacramentary*⁴ in the ninth century, and in the *Romano-Germanic Pontifical*⁵ in the tenth. By way of the pontificals of the Middle Ages⁶ this rite found its way into the *Roman Pontifical*, as we had it until Vatican II.

According to the Code of Canon Law the consecration of a chalice and paten was one of the reserved consecrations: only bishops, cardinals and priests with a special delegation were allowed to consecrate these sacred vessels.⁷ The rite was found in the second part of the *Roman Pontifical*. For the sake of convenience many Latin Missals contained this rite also in a special appendix for

¹ Enarrat. in Ps. 113, C Ch L 40, 1645.

² L. C. Mohlberg (e.a.), *Rerum Eccl. Documenta. Series Maior. Fontes II* (Rome 1957) nn. 62-65, p. 18 f.

³ L. C. Mohlberg (e.a.), *Rerum Eccl. Documenta. Series Maior. Fontes IV* (Rome 1960) nn. 696-699, p. 109.

⁴ J. Deshusses, *Spicilegium Friburgense. Vol. 16* (Fribourg 1971) nn. 1257-1259, p. 421 f.

⁵ C. Vogel—R. Elze, *Studi e Testi* 266 (Rome 1963) nn. 88-95, pp. 155-157.

⁶ M. Andrieu *Le Pontifical romain au moyen âge. Vol. III* (*Studi e Testi* 88) (Rome 1940) pp. 518-520.

⁷ C.I.C., can. 1304.

reserved consecrations and blessings. After the opening words "Adiutorium nostrum" followed first the consecration of the paten, then that of the chalice. Both consecrations had the same structure: after an introductory mention to the bystanders to pray, the minister pronounced the consecratory formula and anointed the vessel with chrism. A final prayer brought the rite to conclusion.

With the publication of a new fascicle of the Roman Pontifical this rite is now a matter of the past. Under the title "Ordo Dedicacionis Ecclesiae et Altaris" the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship published a book of 162 pages under the date of May 29, 1977. But only towards the end of September of the same year the volume became available at the Vatican bookstore.

The new rite is an entirely new creation. Nothing of the former rite for the consecration of the paten and chalice in the Roman Pontifical has been retained. But in its present form the new rite did not come as a complete surprise. A preliminary stage of its development had been made accessible to experts in 1973 in a book with the rather ponderous title "Ordo Dedicacionis Ecclesiae et Altaris deque aliis Locis et Rebus Sacrandis." Originally, Rome had asked scholars from all over the world for their comments on these rites. But a little later all those who were about to consecrate churches and altars, or to have an image or statue of Our Lady crowned could obtain from Rome the permission to use this book. In the Philippines it was used for the dedication of the new cathedrals of Dagupan and Cabanatuan.

The Roman study edition of 1973 contained rites for a number of other blessings, like that of a part-time church, of a cross destined for public veneration, of bells, of a cemetery, of the crowning of a statue or image of Our Lady, etc. Only one of these blessings "survived" in the new fascicle of the Roman Pontifical: the blessing of patens and chalices. All others were omitted, because they belong, properly speaking, in the *Benedictionale* or *Rituale*. Rites and ceremonies found in the Pontifical should be reserved to "pontiffes", i.e., to bishops. From this point of view the blessing of a paten and chalice — no longer a "consecration" in the technical sense of the word — should also not be part of the Pontifical. Their blessing is no longer reserved to bishops. The new fascicle, therefore, abolishes Canon 1304 of the Code of Canon Law, because "every priest can bless a chalice and paten, provided these vessels are made in line with the rules laid down in the Roman Missal."⁸ It seems necessary to call the prescriptions of the General Instruction of the

⁸ Roman Missal, General Instruction, nn. 290-295.

Missal, as they had been published in 1969 — they were inserted in the same form in the Missal itself which appeared only in 1970 — to the attention of our priests. Not seldom they use chalices, patens and ciboria which they would not dare to offer to any of their visitors at lunch or supper as eating and drinking utensils.

290. **Vessels should be made of solid materials which are considered suitable in each region. The conference of bishops will be the judge in this matter. Materials which do not break and deteriorate easily are to be given preference.**

It must be said that the English official translation of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) is not always correct. The word "suitable" does not render the meaning of the Latin "nobilis" which means renowned, fine dignified, and in this context "precious."

291. **Chalices and other vessels which are intended to hold the blood of the Lord should have a cup of non-absorbent material. The base may be of other solid and worthy material.**

Chalice-like wooden vessels which can be bought for a few pesos in any store selling Filipino handicraft are certainly not fulfilling the conditions of the Roman Missal. The acids contained in the wine dissolve the varnish, and the wood easily absorbs the wine. Therefore, the bishops' conference of the Philippines decided in its meeting of July 2-5, 1969 that "chalices and patens may be made of materials other than the customary, provided they are solid, dignified and non-absorbent".⁹

292. **Vessels which are intended to hold hosts, such as a paten ciborium, pyx, monstrance, etc., may be made of other materials which are locally considered valuable and appropriate for sacred use, such as ebony and hard wood.**

Vatican II called for a poor Church, but it is not appropriate to impose this poverty onesidedly on the Lord present in the Blessed Sacrament. It would be a more genuine sign of poverty — more in line with what the Council intended — if priests began with their own style of life. For the celebration of the Mass and the worship of the Eucharist outside Mass we are supposed to continue to use "materials which are locally considered valuable and appropriate for sacred use." It is not true that gold and gilding should no longer be used. This would be in clear contradiction to the next article of the Introduction of the Roman Missal:

⁹ *Liturgical Information Bulletin* 4 (1969) 61.

THE NEW RITE**A. Celebration within Mass**

In former times the bishop consecrated chalices and patens usually in private ceremonies, witnessed only by his sacristan or chaplain. Now the Church wishes that the blessing of a chalice and paten become a communal celebration, that may be even inserted into the Mass. If this is not possible, the blessing should be held in the context of a celebration of the Word of God (Bible Service).

For this Mass (or Bible Service) special readings from Sacred Scripture have been provided. Unfortunately, they may be used only on ferial days of ordinary time, and on optional and obligatory memorials. Other days of higher liturgical rank are ruled out.

The Mass formulary is that of the day, or, if permitted, the votive Mass of the Holy Eucharist (two formularies) or that of the Precious Blood.

As first reading the ordo provides 1 Cor. 11:23-26 ("This cup is the new covenant in my blood") and 1 Cor. 10:14-22a ("Is not the cup of blessing a sharing in the blood of Christ?"). There are also two responsorial psalms: Ps 16(15) with the responsory "You are my inheritance, O Lord, and my cup", and Ps. 23(22) with the responsory "You spread the table before me, my cup is overflowing." The gospel readings are from Mt. 20:20-28 ("You shall indeed drink my cup") and from Mk 14:12-16.22-26 ("He took a cup, gave thanks and passed it on to them, and they all drank from it"). A homily should comment on the readings and the significance of the blessing of chalice and paten.

After the Universal Prayer the servers or some representatives of the local community — especially if they sponsor the chalice and paten— should bring them to the altar while the community sing the antiphon "I will lift up the cup of salvation; I will call on the name of the Lord", or some other suitable song. Leaving his presidential chair the priest comes to the altar where he says the following prayer.¹⁰

**Lord, our God,
in the joy of our heart
we place this chalice and paten on your altar**

¹⁰ This is a private, non-official translation.

**for the celebration
of the sacrifice of the New Covenant.
May the body and blood of your Son
which we offer in and receive from these vessels
make them holy.**

**And to us, Lord, our God,
grant that, while we offer this spotless sacrifice
and are strengthened by holy communion
may be filled with your Spirit
until we share with your Saints
the supper in the kingdom of heaven.**

To you glory and praise for ever.

R. Blessed be God for ever.

This is no blessing formula at all. It states that the priest and the Christian community withdraw these vessels from common, every-day use. Therefore, they are placed on the altar. From now on they are destined for the celebration of the Eucharist. Then the text re-echoes St. Augustine: the body and blood of Christ, to be offered in these vessels, is to make them holy by the very contact. The celebration of the eucharistic sacrifice sanctifies the chalice and paten; no additional blessing is needed.

The subsequent petition for the Christian community is a kind of epiclesis. About to offer the sacrifice of the New Covenant and to receive holy communion, the Christian community asks to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is needed for the celebration of holy Mass. He makes the gifts of bread and wine holy "so that they may become for us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Euch. Prayer II). Only through the Spirit holy communion can become fruitful. Therefore in each of the new eucharistic prayers there is a special communion epiclesis. The spirit-filled body of Christ is to fill the communicants with the Holy Spirit so that they "become one body, one Spirit in Christ" Euch. Prayer III. The Spirit is to lead the communicant to the kingdom of God which is here described under the image of a meal, alluding to words of Sacred Scripture, like: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son" (Mt. 22:2; cf. Lk. 14:15-24). One may also think here of the word of the angel, inserted by the post-Vatican II reform of the Liturgy into the rite of receiving holy communion: "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Apoc. 19:9).

Now the offertory procession begins. Some of the faithful may bring the gifts of bread, wine and water to the altar. As accompanying song the ritual proposes Psalm 116 (115) with the responsory

"I will take up the cup of salvation and will offer a sacrifice of praise." Any other suitable song will also do. Very appropriate would be the incensation of the gifts and the altar in this celebration. At communion time the faithful may receive the precious blood from the new chalice, a further extension of the occasions when they may receive communion under both kinds ¹¹

B. Celebration outside Mass

The blessing of a chalice and paten may also be held in a service of the Word of God. After the people are gathered, the priest, in alb or surplice and stole, proceeds to his seat, while an entrance song is chanted, e.g., Ps. 116(115) with the antiphon indicated above. As greeting the ritual proposes the following text:

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
who offered his body and blood
for us and our salvation,
the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.**

In place of this formula the priest is free to use any other suitable text, preferably from Sacred Scripture. In a short address he is then to introduce the faithful to the celebration. One or two of the readings indicated for the Mass may be read and one of the responsorial psalms be sung in between. A time of sacred silence may be observed instead. After the homily the servers or some representatives of the community bring the chalice and paten to the altar, while an appropriate chant is sung. Standing at the altar the priest invites the people to personal prayer, and after a short while of silence he adds this prayer of blessing:

**Heavenly Father,,
look with kindness on your children.
In the joy of their hearts
they placed this paten and chalice
on the altar.**

**With one heart and mind
they destine these vessels
for the celebration
of the sacrifice of the New Covenant.
Sanctify them by your blessing †.**

**When we celebrate the sacred mysteries
and are strengthened in Holy Communion**

¹¹ Roman Missal. General Instruction, n. 242.

fill us with your Spirit
 until we share with the Saints
 the supper in the kingdom of heaven
 To you be glory and praise for ever.

R. Blessed be God for ever.

Since there is no Mass in which, through the contact with the body and blood of Christ, the chalice and the paten would be made holy, a special blessing formula is needed in addition to the gesture of the faithful in bringing the vessels, separated from daily use, to the altar, thereby assigning them to the service of the eucharist.

The petition to God to bless the chalice and the paten is followed by a petition for the Christian community that is to use them in the future for the celebration of the Mass. Among the fruits of the Mass, frequently asked for in the prayers after communion, are also strength and the bestowal of the Spirit. At the end of the Easter Vigil Mass we pray: "Fill us with your Spirit and make us one in peace and love."

A Prayer of the Faithful, which may be freely formulated, should conclude this celebration. The ritual provides the following model:

Let us pray to our Lord Jesus Christ who gives himself unceasingly to his Church as the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation. Let us say to him:

R. Christ, our Bread from heaven, give us eternal life. Savior of the world, you obeyed the will of the Father, by drinking the cup of suffering for our salvation,

— let us share the mystery of your death and lead us to the kingdom of heaven (R.).

As the Priest of God Most High, you are present in a veiled form in the sacrament of the altar.

— satisfy our hunger for you and transform us into you (R.)

Lamb of God, following your command the Church celebrates the paschal mystery under the signs of bread and wine,

— make the memorial celebration of your passion and resurrection the summit and fountain of the spiritual life of all the faithful (R.).

Son of God, in a miraculous way you satisfy our hunger for you with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,

— may the mystery of the eucharist become for us the source of our love for you and your neighbors (R.).

The summit of our prayer is Christ's prayer on the cross, as the mediator of our salvation. Fulfilling the Father's will he taught us to pray:

Our Father . . .

**Almighty and eternal God,
you redeemed all men
through the death and resurrection of your Son.
Continue his healing work in us.
As we celebrate the memorial of the mystery of Christ
grant us the fruit of our redemption.
He lives and reigns with you for ever and ever.**

There follows the usual conclusion of the celebration. One final observation should be added. The celebration within Mass could be easily inserted into the first Mass celebration of a newly ordained priest in his home parish. Many of our new priests have their own chalice, often bought at great expense and sacrifice by parents, brothers and sisters, and close friends. They should bring the chalice and patent to the altar, and the new priest should bless the vessels in this celebration, witnessed and shared by the family, friends and the entire home parish.