

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION "PER MODUM ACTUS"

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Upon the request of the bishops' conference of the Philippines¹ the Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments granted to the individual local Ordinary in the Philippines² the faculty to permit their priests to appoint suitable persons to help them distribute holy communion on a single occasion, in the case of need, in line with n. 3 of the instruction "Fidei custos" of April 30, 1969.³

THE INSTRUCTION "FIDEI CUSTOS"

This instruction has a long history of development which has not yet come to an end. In spring 1965 the bishops of Communist-occupied Eastern Germany asked the Apostolic See to grant to lay leaders of priestless Sunday services the permission to bring holy communion from the parish church to the out-stations and give it to the people. Rome granted this petition "ad experimentum et ad annum". In 1966 the Holy Office gave the same concession for three more years. A year later the instruction on the Worship of the Eucharist referred to the same concession stating that "if Mass cannot be celebrated because of lack of priests, and communion is distributed by a minister who has the faculty to do this, from the Apostolic See, the rite laid down by the competent authority is to be observed."⁴ The words "the rite laid down, etc.," refer probably to an earlier version of the instruction "Fidei custos". The Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments had now authority over these concessions.

¹ *Liturgical Information Bulletin* 7 (1972) p. 116.

² In mission territories these faculties are to be obtained from the Congregation for the Evangelization of People; *Liturgical Information* 5 (1970) p. F.

³ A first information on this instruction is found in the *Lit. Inform. Bull.* 5 (1970) fasc. 2 and 3 by C.J. Marivoet.

⁴ Instr. "Eucharisticum Mysterium" of May 25, 1967, n. 33.c.

When the Papal Nuncio communicated the Latin text of the instruction "Fidei custos" to our bishops in May 1969, he observed that the Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments had revised and improved on its text. A further improvement was added to this instruction — to be inserted as "n. 6 bis" — on January 10, 1950;⁵ it made it possible that someone could be named extraordinary minister of holy communion just for a single occasion. From then on extraordinary ministers of holy communion can be assigned either on a more *permanent basis*, or for a *single instance*, as the need arises.

GRADUAL CHANGE OF CANON 845

In the meantime the very expression "extraordinary minister of holy communion" underwent a change. According to Canon Law the priest, and *a fortiori* the bishops, is the ordinary minister of holy communion (can. 845). The deacon, however, was only an extraordinary minister of holy communion. When he restored the permanent diaconate in the Latin Church, Pope Paul VI gave deacons, among other functions also the task "to have custody of the eucharist, to distribute it to himself and to others. . . ."⁶ From then on the deacon does not need any more the permission of the local Ordinary or the parish priest (who were to grant this permission only 'gravi de causa') to distribute holy communion. In line with the gradual change of Canon 845 to present-day conditions, the deacon is no longer extraordinary minister of communion. Others have taken this role.

Quite recently, the Motu Proprio "Ministeria quaedam:" of August 15, 1972 decreed that acolytes from now on are extraordinary ministers of holy communion, and are to step in "when the ministers spoken of in canon 845 . . . are not available or are prevented by ill health, age or another pastoral ministry from performing this function, or when the number of those approaching the Sacred Table is so great that the celebration of Mass would be unduly prolonged" (n. VI).

The official and definitive text of the instruction "Fidei custos" has not yet been made public, because, presumably, further changes in the text are to be expected.

⁵ *Boletín Eclesiástico* 44 (1970) 182-184.

⁶ Motu Proprio "Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem" of June 18, 1967, n. 223.

Our bishops did not ask the Apostolic See for any general faculty to appoint extraordinary ministers of holy communion on a *permanent basis*. They only asked for and received the faculty that parish priests, parochial vicars, rectors of churches and other priests in the active care of souls (e.g., hospital chaplains) can be empowered to appoint suitable persons for the distribution of holy communion on a *single occasion*, in accordance with n. 3 of the instruction "Fidei custos".

A PARTIALLY OBSOLETE ARTICLE

This article 3 states that the suitable person of whom n. 1 of the same instruction speaks has to be chosen in a special order. To be preferred are subdeacons, clerics in minor orders and those who received first tonsure. Next in line are religious brothers, religious sisters, catechists (who may have precedence over religious sisters, according to the prudent judgment of the pastor) and finally laymen and laywomen.

But this article 3 is largely obsolete today. In the Apostolic Letter "Ministeria quaedam" mentioned above, the Holy Father decreed that "by our Apostolic Authority we enact the following norms, derogating — if and in so far as necessary — from provisions of the Code of Canon Law until now in force, and we promulgate them with this Letter:

I. First Tonsure is no longer conferred; entrance into the clerical state is joined to the diaconate.

II. What up to now were called minor orders, are henceforth called "ministries".

III. Ministries may be committed to lay Christians; hence they are no longer to be considered as reserved to candidates for the Sacrament of Orders.

IV. Two ministers, adapted to present-day needs, are to be preserved in the whole of the Latin Church, namely those of *lector* and *acolyte*. The functions, therefore, committed to the subdeacon are entrusted to the lector and acolyte; consequently, the major order of subdiaconate no longer exists in the Latin Church.

V. The acolyte . . . is also to distribute holy communion as an extraordinary minister . . . He can be entrusted with publicly exposing the Blessed Sacrament for adoration by the faithful and afterwards replacing it, but not with blessing the people . . .

VI. In accordance with the venerable tradition of the Church, installation in the ministries of lector and acolyte is reserved to men."

It seems, therefore, that major seminarians in general are those to be chosen first as extraordinary ministers of holy communion. Of those, explicitly mentioned in n. 3 of the instruction "Fidei custos" are then left, in the order of preference, religious brothers, religious sisters, catechists, laymen and laywomen. It is self-understood that only those are chosen for this task who are respected in the locality as good Christians and are sufficiently mature and well instructed.

IN CASE OF NEED

This concession has been granted for the good of the faithful, in the case of need. What kinds of need does the rescript foresee?

When the number of communicants is so great that the Mass would last too long, if the priest celebrant alone would give holy communion to the faithful. On several occasions the writer of these lines had to distribute holy communion for more than twenty minutes on Sundays in parishes of the greater Manila area, when the priest(s) assigned for the distribution of holy communion were prevented from coming or from coming in time (sick calls, late return from barrio Masses). The following Mass was delayed in these cases and people coming for the next Mass and those leaving were inconvenienced by their crowding together for some time. As a consequence, a number of people left the church without waiting for the end of the Mass.

Similar situations will occur more frequently in this country, because many of those parishes which until now had an assistant, or got supply from religious communities, will not get assisting priests, because the number of priests, at least in the foreseeable future will drop. We have at present less seminarians than some years ago. Only very few priests from abroad can be expected, and many foreign-born priests working in the Philippines will reach retirement age in the near future.

If they do not retire when they are old, weak or sick, they need helpers when they say Mass for the people, in the distribution of holy communion, even if the number of the communi-

cants should not be so great. In addition to all this we must not forget that the number of our Catholics is going to grow, thereby aggravating the situation.

APPOINTMENT OF EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS

First of all, a parish priest, or any other priest mentioned in the rescript, has to obtain from his local Ordinary the faculty to assign extraordinary ministers of holy communion "per modum actus." But how does he appoint them for actual service?

First he has to know his parishioners, from whom he has to select his helpers. He should have a list of prospective helpers, who are to be given a training. They are to be informed ahead of time that they are to be selected at a given Sunday and a certain Mass. A *short rite* inserted into the Mass is to bring this assignment to the attention of the faithful assembled for holy Mass. Here follows this rite in the translation of Fr. Camilo Marivoet, *cicm*.⁷

1. The person who will have to assist in giving communion should be wearing clothes fitting for this sacred ministry. During the breaking of the bread and the mixing, he comes forward to the sanctuary and stands by the side of the priest. When the *Agnus Dei* is finished, the priest blesses him with the words: "*May the Lord God bless and protect you to give the Body of Christ to your brothers (and sisters) today.*" All answer: "*Amen.*"
2. After the priest has taken communion as usual, he gives communion to the minister if the latter wishes to receive. Then he hands the ciborium or container with the hosts to him and both proceed to give Communion to the faithful.
3. When the minister gives Communion, he says to each person: "*The Body of Christ.*" The communicant answers: "*Amen.*"
4. After Communion the minister washes his hands and returns to his place among the faithful.

Rome had originally demanded that lay people, helping to distribute holy communion, had to wear liturgical attire, i.e., a cassock and a surplice. It was relatively easy to insist on this demand as long as only men were admitted to this service.

⁷ *Liturgical Information Bulletin*, May-June 1970, p. L. The original Latin text has been published in the *Boletín Eclesiástico* 44 (1970) p. 183 f.

This demand has not been reiterated in the extension of the faculties in January 1970. Now the text speaks only of "clothes fitted for this sacred ministry" (*veste huic sacro ministerio convenienti indutus*). It has been generally accepted in many countries that these extra-ordinary ministers of holy communion wear decent civilian clothes. The condition that not anyone but only mature and well-instructed Christians in good standing may be appointed seems to be a guarantee that the necessary decency of dress will be observed.

According to the instruction of June 29, 1970 on the giving of holy communion under both kinds "the episcopal conferences . . . may decree to what extent, with what discretion, and under both kinds in other cases than those mentioned in the instruction." It would be very meaningful indeed, if those who help distribute holy communion, could receive the eucharist under both kinds.

It may easily be that in virtue of this rescript of the Apostolic See relatively many of our laymen at one time or another are asked to distribute holy communion. On this occasion they are allowed to take the host in their hand. This will naturally lead to the question: Why should we not receive holy communion in our hands if so many of us are allowed to touch the host with their fingers and bring it even to their fellow Christians? We, are therefore, confronted by the problem of "communion in the hand".

The instruction "Fidei custos" foresaw that the appointment of extraordinary ministers of holy communion should be given only for a period of three years. After this time the bishops had to report on their experiences, and ask anew for the same concession. Rome is now more generous, realizing most probably that the time of experimenting is over. Therefore, the Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments granted this faculty "ad nutum Sanctae Sedis", that is to say, for an indefinite period of time, until it may have found its place in the future Code of Canon Law.