

Prayer and Contemplation in the Presence of the Eucharist



The following article appeared in the September 2006 Newsletter of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy.

In recent months, the Secretariat for the Liturgy has received several inquiries concerning the proper rites for adoration of the exposed Blessed Sacrament. While several of these inquiries are answered in the BCL publication *Thirty-one Questions on Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament*, a few additional clarifications are provided here for the information of our readers.

1. How does adoration of the exposed Blessed Sacrament differ from adoration of the Holy Eucharist reserved in the tabernacle?

Eucharistic adoration of the reserved Blessed Sacrament is a devotional act. Eucharistic exposition is a liturgical action, by which the Blessed Sacrament is displayed outside the tabernacle in a monstrance or ciborium for public veneration by the faithful. It is a public celebration that enables the faithful to perceive more clearly the relationship between the reserved Sacrament and the "sacrifice of the Mass [which] is truly the origin and the purpose of the worship that is shown to the Eucharist outside Mass" (*Eucharisticum Mysterium*, no. 3e).

2. What are the liturgical rites for adoration of the exposed Blessed Sacrament?

These rites are found in the third chapter ritual book *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* [HCW], entitled *Forms of Worship of the Holy Eucharist*.

The rites for adoration of the exposed Blessed Sacrament are found in numbers 82-100.

These rites consist of Exposition, Adoration, Benediction, and Reposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

3. What are the rites of Exposition and Adoration?

While the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, and the ciborium or monstrance is placed upon the altar, it is fitting that a song be sung by those gathered. If the monstrance is used (rather than the ciborium), the minister incenses the sacrament (cf. HCW, no. 93). For the period of adoration "there should be prayers, songs, and readings to direct the attention of the faithful to the worship of Christ the Lord" (HCW, no. 95). A homily or brief exhortation is also appropriate, as are extended periods of silence.

4. What are the Rites of Benediction and Reposition?

For the rites of Benediction, described in HCW, no. 97, the priest incenses the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance, prays one of the prescribed prayers (cf. HCW, nos. 98, 224-229), and, with the humeral veil, silently makes the sign of the cross over the people (cf. HCW, no. 99). As the Blessed Sacrament is then reposed in the tabernacle, the people may sing an acclamation. (cf. HCW, no. 100).

5. When the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, how many candles should be used?

"For exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance, four to six candles are lighted and incense is used. For exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the ciborium, at least two candles should be lighted, and incense may be used" (HCW, no. 85).

6. What vesture should be worn for the rites of Adoration of the exposed Blessed Sacrament?

"The minister, if he is a priest or deacon, should vest in an alb, or a surplice over a cassock, and a stole. Other ministers should wear either the liturgical vestments which are used in the region or the vesture which is suitable for this ministry and which has been approved by the Ordinary. The priest or deacon should wear a white cope and humeral veil to give the blessing at the end of adoration, when the exposition takes place with the monstrance; in the case of exposition in the ciborium, the humeral veil should be worn" (HCW, no. 92).

7. May these rites be adapted or shortened for particular circumstances?

No. The liturgical rites may not be adapted or shortened beyond the scope envisioned by the rubrics of *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*. Simply opening

the tabernacle to enhance private or devotional prayer, in not in conformity with the liturgical requirements of HCW, nos. 93-85. It might be noted, however, that the Benediction is omitted when the exposition is led by a lay person (cf. HCW, no. 91).

8. Is it permissible to use an "Exposition Tabernacle," which includes a small window with a sliding cover, for exposition of the Blessed Sacrament?

No. "The holy Eucharist is to be reserved in a solid tabernacle. It must be opaque and unbreakable" (HCW, no. 10; Cf. Code of Canon Law, 938 §3; *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 314).

9. May Evening Prayer (Vespers) be celebrated in the presence of the exposed Blessed Sacrament?

Yes. "Part of the liturgy of the hours, especially the principal hours, may be celebrated before the Blessed Sacrament when there is a lengthy period of exposition. This liturgy extends the praise and thanksgiving offered to God in the Eucharistic celebration to the several hours of the day; it directs the prayers of the Church to Christ and through him to the Father in the name of the whole world" (HCW, no. 96).