

Final Phoenix Communion norms allow wide use of wine

Zoe Ryan | Nov. 14, 2011



Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted of Phoenix reads before the start of Mass Nov. 14 during the U.S. bishops annual fall meeting in Baltimore. (CNS/Nancy Phelan Wiechec)

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The Phoenix diocese is not going to restrict the distribution of the Precious Blood at Mass, say the diocese's final instructions on the distribution of Communion, promulgated by Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted Nov. 7.

An announcement in September that the diocese was reexamining norms for the distribution of Communion under both kinds with the aim of restricting the distribution of Communion wine, became a major news story, with many ordinary Catholics and liturgists saying the diocese misunderstood the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, the set of rules that govern the Mass commonly called "the GIRM."

Fr. Kieran Kleczewski, executive director of the Office of Worship in Phoenix, said that the diocese had struggled with the question of distribution of Communion under both kinds, meaning bread and wine, according to a report in the Nov. 17 issue of the diocesan newspaper, *The Catholic Sun*.

"The question was whether the new General Instruction of the Roman Missal was restricting when the chalice was offered, or whether it was expansive," Kleczewski told the newspaper.

"In preparing the new guidelines for Communion, the bishop and the Office of Worship determined that the General Instruction of the Roman Missal sought to expand and normalize the occasions for when the Precious Blood could be offered."

This point was further clarified by Olmsted himself in a column he wrote for the Nov. 17 *The Catholic Sun*. "As stated in the norms for the Diocese of Phoenix, Holy Communion under both kinds (hereafter 'both kinds') is permitted whenever it is judged appropriate by the priest to whom a given community is entrusted, provided that certain conditions are met." That follows GIRM 283.

According to the newly released norms, Communion may be distributed in the Phoenix diocese in the following instances (provided that the appropriate conditions are met): solemnities, Sundays, holy days of obligation, the

occasions listed in the ritual books, and weekday Masses.

Olmsted "is to be complimented" for clarifying the norms and doing so quickly, said Phoenix Catholic Jack Rubino, who was confused in September about the reasoning behind changing the distribution under both forms.

Rubino, a member of the church reform group Call to Action, also said that he's sorry the bishop hasn't been more accessible to the people, releasing information in newspaper articles or letters to priests and not directly to the people.

It's to the bishop's credit for reviewing the situation, he said.

Olmsted wrote a private letter to local priests, saying he had misunderstood church documents, and apologized for provoking anxiety among lay Catholics, according to *The Arizona Republic*. Michael Clancy of *The Arizona Republic* broke the story, as well as the previous story in September.

In his newspaper column, Olmsted wrote that there are "eight conditions which will assist a pastor to discern the appropriateness of distributing Communion under both kinds in various situations."

The appropriate conditions that should be present when both forms are offered: no danger of the sacred species being profaned; an adequate number of ordinary ministers of Communion is present and if not, an adequate number of properly deputed and trained extraordinary ministers of Communion is present; role of the priest and deacon as the ordinary ministers of Communion is not obscured by an excessive use of extraordinary ministers. More can be found on the Phoenix diocese's website.

Another provision allows Communion wine, if not distributed at that Mass, to be distributed to those who cannot receive the form of bread for medical or health reasons.

According to reports in *The Arizona Republic* and Religion News Service, New Orleans Archbishop Gregory Aymond, chairman of the bishops' liturgy committee, wrote to fellow bishops on Oct. 26, saying that the General Instruction of the Roman Missal does not place additional restrictions on Communion in the form of wine.

Olmsted and his liturgical experts had consulted with Aymond's committee before issuing the new norms Nov. 7, a diocesan spokesman told Religion News Service.

Olmsted wrote a letter Nov. 7 to priests in the Phoenix diocese, outlining the final norms, apologizing for the confusion in communication and requesting their "help in correcting the confusion" and implementing the norms.

In preparing the new norms, the two things he misunderstood, Olmsted said in the letter, was the indult that expired in 2005 was for extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to purify the sacred vessels after Communion, not for their help distributing Communion; and the instructions of GIRM 283 make distribution under both forms broad, not restricted.

These new understandings came through discussions with the bishops' conference Committee on Liturgy and others.

He apologized for any "pastoral problems, hurt and confusion caused by mishandling the dialogue and communication about the norms." He admitted that it would have been better to release the norms after consulting with the Presbyteral Council and the Deans first, and then the priests. In this way the consultation would be private, and the prepared norms and all "the background information and the catechetical tools to

handle misunderstandings" then would go to the priests, according to the letter.

He said in the letter he was sorry for any tension between pastor and parish caused by the confusion.

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