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Introduction

The celebration of the Eucharist is the center of the entire Christian life, both for the universal Church and for the local congregations of the Church. “The other sacraments, like every other ministry of the Church and every work of the apostolate, are linked with the Holy Eucharist and have it as their end. For the Eucharist contains the Church’s entire spiritual wealth, that is, Christ himself. He is our Passover and living bread; through his flesh, made living and life giving by the Holy Spirit, he is bringing to life people and in this way inviting and leading them to offer themselves together with him, as well as their labors and all created things.” ¹

Since Vatican II the liturgical renewal has focused its greatest energy on restoring the full, conscious, and active participation of the assembly to every celebration of the Eucharist. The assembly has been invited to take its rightful role in the celebration of the Eucharist by praying, responding, singing, listening, and ultimately joining itself to Christ as he offers himself in praise and worship to the Father. The assembly has also been sent from the celebration with a renewed understanding of its mission to the world to be the living presence of Christ in their daily lives.

Even as we continue this education and formation of the assembly in its role at the Eucharistic celebration it is important to remember that the Church has a long history of devotion to the reserved Eucharist.

The celebration of the Eucharist in the sacrifice of the Mass, moreover, “is truly the origin and purpose of the worship that is shown to the Eucharist outside Mass.” Christ the Lord, “is offered in the Sacrifice of the Mass when he begins to be sacramentally present as the spiritual food of the faithful under the appearances of bread and wine”; “after the sacrifice has been offered...as long as the Eucharist is reserved in churches and oratories, Christ is truly the Emmanuel, that is, ‘God with us’. Day and night he is in our midst; full of grace and truth, he dwells among us.” ²

As St. Augustine put it: “nemo autem illam carnem manducat, nisi prius adoraverit; peccemus non adorando...no one eats that flesh without first adoring it; we should sin were we not to adore it.” ³ In the Eucharist, the Son of God comes to meet us and desires to become one with us; eucharistic adoration is simply the natural consequence of the eucharistic celebration, which is itself the Church’s supreme act of adoration. Receiving the Eucharist means adoring him whom we receive. Only in this way do we become one with him, and are given, as it were, a foretaste of the beauty of the heavenly liturgy. The act of adoration outside Mass prolongs and intensifies all that takes place during the liturgical celebration itself.⁴

¹ Eucharistiae Sacramentum, #1.  
² Ibid., #2.  
³ Enarrationes in Psalmos 98:6, CCL XXXIX, 1385.  
⁴ Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Sacramentum Caritatis, Benedict XVI, # 66.
The following guidelines are designed to provide parishes with the most recent directives for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. They will include regulations for:

1. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament Reserved in the Tabernacle
2. Celebrations of Exposition and Benediction
3. Solemn Annual Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament
4. Perpetual Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament
Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament
Reserved in the Tabernacle

From its earliest history the Church has proclaimed a faith that Christ remains under the appearance of bread and wine even after the celebration is completed. In his First Apology, # 66—67, Justin Martyr reports that the deacons carried the food, over which thanks had been offered, to those not present. Both St. Augustine and Pope St. Leo the Great give stress to the receiving of communion and its purpose:

“If you receive well, you are what you have received...Since you are the body of Christ and his members, it is your mystery that is placed on the Lord’s table; it is your mystery that you receive...Be what you see, and receive what you are.”5

The same point is made by Pope St. Leo the Great: “The partaking of the body and blood of Christ has no other effect than to make us pass over into what we receive.”6

In a talk given at Phoenix Park during his visit to Ireland in 1979, Pope John Paul II gives further explanation of the meaning of the Eucharist in our lives when he says:

The truth of our union with Jesus Christ in the Eucharist is tested by whether or not we really love our fellow men and women; it is tested by how we treat others, especially our families: husbands and wives, children and parents, brothers and sisters. It is tested by whether or not we try to be reconciled with our enemies, by whether or not we forgive those who hurt us or offend us. It is tested by whether we practice in life what our faith teaches us.

Adoration of the reserved Eucharist in the tabernacle has been an important private devotion in our church. Time spent in prayer and adoration allows God to open us to the deeper realities of the Eucharist and prepare us for a fully conscious celebration of the Eucharist.

5 St. Augustine, Sermon 272.
Guidelines for Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle

• Our Lord is always present in the Eucharist reserved in the tabernacle of a church or chapel. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle may take place anytime, either individually or communally, when the church is open.

• Pastors should see that churches and public oratories where the Holy Eucharist is reserved are open every day at least for some hours, at a convenient time, so that the faithful may easily pray in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle.  

• Pastors and pastoral ministers are encouraged to avail themselves of frequent prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

• The Blessed Sacrament is to be reserved habitually in only one tabernacle of a church or oratory. It is to be immovable, made of solid and opaque material, and locked in such a way that the danger of profanation is avoided as much as possible.  

• Genuflection in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, whether reserved in the tabernacle or exposed for public adoration, is on one knee.  

• The place in a church or oratory where the Eucharist is reserved in a tabernacle should be truly a place of honor. It should also be suited to private prayer “by reason of the quietness of location, the space available in front of the tabernacle and the supply of benches or seats and kneelers” so that the faithful may readily and to their advantage continue to honor the Lord in this sacrament by private worship.

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7 Canon 937.  
8 Canon 938.  
9 Eucharistiae Sacramentum, # 84.  
10 Redemptionis Sacramentum, #130.
Celebrations of Exposition and Benediction

Benediction, as we knew it before the revised rituals, originated as a tendency to conclude liturgical celebrations by blessing the gathered faithful with the host. Benediction was almost never a celebration in its own right but, rather, a popular way to conclude other celebrations. It was used as a way to lend solemnity to a celebration for which the faithful had already come together.

Since 1974 we have a liturgical rite for the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction. It is no longer considered simply a devotion but, rather, is a part of the Church’s official liturgy. The Committee on the Liturgy of the USCCB gave the following answer when the question was posed: “May the Stations of the Cross be prayed during Eucharistic Adoration?”

Eucharistic exposition and benediction are no longer considered devotions, but rather are a part of the Church’s official liturgy. Whereas in the past benediction was frequently added to the end of another service or devotion, this is no longer permitted. Eucharistic exposition and benediction is a complete liturgical service in its own right and is to be celebrated as such.

The Stations of the Cross is an ancient and venerable devotion which is designed to foster a devotion to and meditation on the mystery of the Passion of Christ. As commendable as such a devotion may be, it can never fulfill the purpose of eucharistic adoration that is to draw us more deeply into the mystery of Christ’s presence in the Holy Eucharist. Therefore, neither the Stations of the Cross nor any other devotion should be prayed during exposition of the Eucharist.

I would strongly encourage anyone involved in the planning of eucharistic devotions to bear in mind that the purpose of all exposition is adoration of Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament. The liturgies which the Church provides for us in the Order for Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist should provide the basis for all solemn eucharistic worship.

The Rite of Eucharistic Exposition and Benediction takes seriously the dictum that the celebration of the Eucharist is the source of all Eucharistic devotion. Exposition and Benediction is meant to deepen the faith of God’s people and to prepare them to celebrate the Eucharist with clearer appreciation for this mystery of faith. As in all liturgical celebrations the Rite of Eucharistic Exposition and Benediction includes in its format readings of the Word of God, as well as, songs, prayers, and time for silent prayer.
Shorter expositions of the Eucharist are to be arranged in such a way that the blessing with the Eucharist is preceded by a reasonable time for readings of the word of God, songs, prayers, and a period of silent prayer.

**Exposition merely for the purpose of giving benediction is prohibited.**\(^{11}\)

During the exposition, everything should be so arranged that the faithful can devote themselves attentively in prayer to Christ the Lord.\(^{12}\)

The recitation of the Rosary has been described as a prayer inspired by the Gospel and centered on the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption… it should be considered a prayer of deep Christological orientation.\(^{13}\)

Therefore,

- One should not expose the Eucharist only to recite the rosary.
- However, among the prayers that are used during adoration, the recitation of the rosary may be included, emphasizing the Christological aspects with biblical readings relating to the mysteries, and providing time for silent adoration and meditation on them.\(^{14}\)

**Guidelines for Celebrations of Exposition and Benediction**

- Celebrations of Exposition and Benediction are to include readings from Scripture, prayers and songs, homilies or brief exhortations, and periods of religious silence.
  - Exposition merely for the purpose of giving benediction is prohibited.
  - Prayers during exposition and benediction should be so arranged that the faithful can devote themselves attentively in prayer to Christ, the Lord.\(^{15}\)
  - The Blessed Sacrament, only under the species of bread, may be exposed in the ciborium or in a monstrance. However, care must be taken that everything clearly brings out the meaning of Eucharistic worship in its correlation with the Mass.\(^{16}\)
  - For exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance, four or six candles are lighted, as at Mass, and incense is used.\(^{17}\)

\(^{11}\) Eucharistiae Sacramentum, #89.  
\(^{12}\) Eucharisticum Mysterium, #62.  
\(^{13}\) Marialis Cultus #46.  
\(^{15}\) Eucharisticum Mysterium, #62  
\(^{16}\) Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass, #82  
\(^{17}\) Ibid., #85
• For exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the ciborium, at least two candles should be lighted and incense may be used.\textsuperscript{18}

• Genuflection in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, whether reserved in the tabernacle or exposed for public adoration, is on one knee.\textsuperscript{19}

• Benediction is no longer permitted as an ending to a devotion (Stations of the Cross, novena, etc.) or as an ending to Mass.

• In the celebration of Mass the principal modes of worship by which Christ is present to his Church are gradually revealed. Consequently, it is more in keeping with the nature of the celebration that the Eucharistic presence of Christ, which is the fruit of the consecration, should not be on the altar from the very beginning of Mass.\textsuperscript{20}

• Since the purpose of Eucharistic adoration is to lead the community to the Eucharistic celebration, various ministers should be used during these celebrations. These might include readers, cantors, and acolytes.

• The Divine Praises are not required in the format of the revised ritual. Their recitation occurred immediately after the blessing and before the reposition. In the present rite they may be sung or recited as acclamations during reposition or may be included during one of the periods of prayer during the time of exposition.\textsuperscript{21}

• Exposition and Benediction may be incorporated into the rhythm of the liturgical life of a parish or community on a regular basis (e.g. monthly).

\textit{(See Appendix III for a copy of the Rite of Eucharistic Exposition and Benediction.)}

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., #85.
\textsuperscript{19} Eucharistiae Sacramentum, # 84.
\textsuperscript{20} Eucharisticum Mysterium, #55.
\textsuperscript{21} Order for Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist, #148 – 150.
Solemn Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament formerly known as Forty Hours Devotion has been a part of the Eucharistic devotion in the United States since 1857. This devotion originated in the early part of the sixteenth century at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Milan, Italy, probably as a commemoration of the forty hours that Christ’s body lay in the tomb between his death and resurrection.

The solemn exposition of the Holy Eucharist offers the opportunity to the people of God for prayerful reflection on their call to a deeper devotion to the Holy Eucharist and a more faithful living of the Christian life. It provides them with an opportunity to become more aware of Christ’s presence with his people and invites them to a spiritual communion with him.22

Care must be taken that during these expositions the worship given to the Blessed Sacrament should be seen, by signs, in its relation to the Mass. It is thus desirable that when the exposition in question is solemn and prolonged, it should be begun at the end of the Mass in which the host to be exposed has been consecrated.23

The Eucharist is the “mystery of faith”. Christ is made present in the Eucharist to be the church’s sacrifice and the spiritual food for her pilgrimage. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament offers the community the opportunity to deepen its faith in this mystery and challenges the community to live its mission to be the presence of Christ in its daily life, bringing the “kingdom” to fulfillment.

Guidelines for the Solemn Annual Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

• In churches and oratories where Eucharist is reserved, it is recommended that solemn exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for an extended period of time should take place once a year, even though this period need not be strictly continuous. In this way the local community may meditate on this mystery more deeply and adore.

22 Eucharistiae Sacramentum, #79.
23 Eucharisticum Mysterium #60.
• This kind of exposition, however, may take place only if there is assurance of the participation of a reasonable number of faithful for the entire time of exposition.24

• The choice of the date and the duration are left to the pastor after dialogue with the Pastoral Council.

• While the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, the celebration of Mass in the same area of the church is forbidden, all concessions and contrary customs valid up to the present time notwithstanding.25

• Genuflection in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, whether reserved in the tabernacle or exposed for public adoration, is on one knee.26

• During the exposition there should be prayers, songs, and readings to direct the attention of the faithful to the worship of Christ the Lord. To encourage a prayerful spirit, there should be readings from Scripture with a homily or brief exhortations to develop a better understanding of the Eucharistic mystery.27

• Every effort should be made to ensure that there are at least two people present at all times that the Blessed Sacrament is exposed.28

• In processions in which the Eucharist is carried through the streets solemnly, with singing, the Christian people give public witness of their faith and devotion toward this sacrament. If circumstances prevent an outdoor procession it may be held inside the church.

• For the Annual Solemn Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament a procession with the Blessed Sacrament should go from one church to another. Nevertheless, if local circumstances require, the procession may return to the same church where it began.29

• The procession begins after the Mass, and the host to be carried in the procession is consecrated at this Mass.

• Processions should conclude with Benediction of the people with the Blessed Sacrament in the place where the procession terminates.30

24 Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass, #86.
25 Eucharisticum Mysterium, #61.
26 Eucharistiae Sacramentum, #84.
28 Redemptionis Sacramentum, #138.
29 Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass, #107
30 Ibid., #25
Perpetual exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is a devotion and practice which is permitted to those religious communities that have it as an integral part of their communal life and to pious associations of the laity which have received official recognition.

If a pious association of the laity, which has perpetual exposition as a part of its constitution, is established within a parish, the activity of that association should be seen as separate from that of the parish, although all members of the parish are free to participate in it.\(^1\)

It is important to have a proper understanding of the purpose of such devotion. Prayer before the Blessed Sacrament ought to be dominated by thanksgiving for Christ who is always present to the Church. Christ is not present because he needs the Church to comfort him, or keep him company. Rather, he is present because the Church needs to be comforted by him and assured of the covenant of God that has been sealed by Christ’s death and resurrection. It is humble reception of God’s fidelity that ought to shape our prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

Christ is also present for those who are absent and for those who have not yet been touched by his saving word and work. Far from drawing us from the world of everyday life, our attention ought to be drawn to the needs of all our brothers and sisters. In this way, devotion to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament exposed will deepen our faith, trust and love, and enable us to understand more fully the mission which every celebration of the Eucharist calls for.

Guidelines for Perpetual Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

- The permission of the local ordinary is necessary for Perpetual Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.
- Perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the ciborium or monstrance is permitted in religious communities that have such a practice as part of their life and pious associations with official recognition that have such a practice in their constitutions.
• Perpetual exposition of the Blessed Sacrament at a parish should be in a chapel distinct from the body of the church so as not to interfere with the normal activities of the parish or its daily liturgical celebrations.\(^{32}\)

• Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is not permitted during the Easter Triduum.\(^{33}\)

• Every effort should be made to ensure that there are at least two people present at all times that the Blessed Sacrament is exposed.\(^{34}\)

• There must absolutely never be periods when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed and there is no one present for adoration.

• Where there cannot be uninterrupted exposition because there are not a sufficient number of worshipers, it is permissible to replace the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle at fixed hours that are announced ahead of time. But this may not be done more than twice during a day.\(^{35}\)

• Care should be taken to ensure the safety of those engaged in adoration, and to ensure the Blessed Sacrament is not needlessly in danger of desecration, especially during the night.

**Appendix I**

**Resources**


**Documents**

• Eucharistiae Sacramentum
• Eucharisticum Mysterium
• Inter Oecumenici
• Redemptionis Sacramentum
• Sacramentum Caritatis

**Web Sites**

• The Committee on Divine Worship of the USCCB has a series of resources on its web site: [http://www.usccb.org/liturgy](http://www.usccb.org/liturgy) under the heading questions and answers.

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\(^{34}\) Redemptionis Sacramentum, #138.

\(^{35}\) Order for Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist, #12.
Included are:

- Nine Questions on the Rites for Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament
- Devotions and Eucharistic Adoration
- Perpetual Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

**Appendix II**

**Rite of Eucharistic Exposition and Benediction**

**Exposition**

After the people have assembled, a song may be sung while the minister comes to the altar. If the Holy Eucharist is not reserved at the altar where exposition is to take place, the minister puts on a humeral veil and brings the sacrament from the place of reservation; he is accompanied by servers or by the faithful with lighted candles.

The ciborium or monstrance should be placed upon the table of the altar which is covered with a cloth. If exposition with the monstrance is to extend over a long period, a throne in an elevated position may be used, but this should not be too lofty or distant. After exposition, if the monstrance is used, the minister incenses the sacrament. If the adoration is to be lengthy, he may then withdraw.

In the case of more solemn and lengthy exposition, the host should be consecrated in the Mass which immediately precedes the exposition and after communion should be placed in the monstrance upon the altar. The Mass ends with the prayer after communion, and the concluding rites are omitted. Before the priest leaves, he may place the Blessed Sacrament on the throne and incense it. 36

**Minister of Exposition**

The ordinary minister for exposition of the Eucharist is a priest or deacon. In the absence of a priest or deacon, a commissioned extraordinary minister of Holy Communion or another person appointed by the local Ordinary may publicly expose and later repose the Holy Eucharistic for adoration of the faithful.

If the minister for exposition of the Eucharist is a priest or deacon he blesses the people with the sacrament.
If the minister is other than a priest or deacon it is not lawful for that person to give the blessing with sacrament, nor would he or she incense the Blessed Eucharist.\(^{37}\)

**Adoration**

During the exposition there should be prayers, songs, and readings to direct the attention of the faithful to the worship of Christ the Lord. To encourage a prayerful spirit, there should be readings from scripture with a homily or brief exhortation to develop a better understanding of the Eucharistic mystery. It is also desirable for the people to respond to the word of God by singing and spending some periods of time in religious silence.

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.\(^{38}\)

**Benediction**

Toward the end of the exposition the priest or deacon goes to the altar, genuflects, and kneels. Then a hymn or other Eucharistic song is sung. Meanwhile the minister, while kneeling, incenses the sacrament if the exposition has taken place with the monstrance. Afterward the minister rises and sings or says:

Let us pray:

(After a brief period of silence, the minister continues)

Lord Jesus Christ,
you gave us the Eucharist
as the memorial of your suffering and death.
May our worship of this sacrament of your body and blood
help us to experience the salvation you won for us
and the peace of the kingdom
where you live with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
One God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

After the prayer the priest or deacon puts on the humeral veil, genuflects, and takes the monstrance or ciborium. He makes the sign of the cross over the people with the monstrance or ciborium, in silence.

\(^{37}\) Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass” #91-92

\(^{38}\) Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass” #95-96
After the blessing the priest or deacon who gave the blessing, or another priest or deacon, replaces the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle and genuflects. Meanwhile the people may sing or say an acclamation, and the minister leaves.\(^{39}\)

**If the minister is other than a priest or deacon….**

Toward the end of the exposition the presiding minister invites all to pray the Our Father then immediately adds:

Let us pray:

(After a brief period of silence, the minister continues)

Lord Jesus Christ,  
you gave us the Eucharist  
as the memorial of your suffering and death.  
May our worship of this sacrament of your body and blood  
help us to experience the salvation you won for us  
and the peace of the kingdom  
where you live with the Father and the Holy Spirit,  
One God, for ever and ever.

Amen\(^{40}\)

The minister then removes the Blessed Sacrament from the monstrance and places it in the tabernacle immediately after the prayer. The minister and people then depart.