

Come, Worship the Lord!

Promoting Adoration of the Most Holy Eucharist

ISSUE: What is adoration of the Most Holy Eucharist? How can I promote adoration of the Most Holy Eucharist with exposition in my parish and diocese?

RESPONSE: The Most Holy Eucharist is the body and blood of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (cf. Mt. 26:26-28; Jn. 6:55). Because this sacrament is the fullness and substance of His divinity and humanity, His presence demands proper adoration. When we adore the Most Holy Eucharist, we fulfill the first commandment, to worship only God in the fullness of our love (cf. 1 Cor. 10:14-17). Indeed, adoration of the Most Holy Eucharist is true worship in Spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:23).

The Tradition of Adoration

In general, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament occurs both during the celebration of Mass and outside of Mass. Without a doubt, the liturgy of the Mass is the greatest act of worship we offer Our Lord here on earth. This celebration expresses the fullness of our faith and gives us a foretaste of heaven's glory. During our time outside of Mass, we must continually move our hearts and minds in prayer to Our Lord. Adoration of the Most Holy Eucharist outside of Mass helps us focus our prayers on Jesus Christ, who is the Blessed Sacrament, and leads us to the Eucharistic sacrifice, which "is the summit and the source of all Christian worship and life" (canon 897).

Outside of Mass, adoration of the Most Holy Eucharist occurs whenever we worship and offer prayers to God in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass is strongly encouraged. For example, canon 937 provides:

Unless a grave reason prevents it, the church in which the Most Holy Eucharist is reserved should be open to the faithful for at least some hours each day so that they are able to spend time in prayer before the Most Blessed Sacrament.

Adoration of the Most Holy Eucharist outside of Mass has taken many forms throughout the history of the Church. In the early centuries of the Church, there is record that some of the faithful reserved the Blessed Sacrament within their homes privately.¹ Because the Blessed Sacrament was reserved by the priest or deacon for the sick and dying, these "private reservations" were probably for veneration, and not for reception by the sick and dying. As Pope Paul VI noted in *Mysterium Fidei* (MF):

The Catholic Church has always offered and still offers the cult of latria to the Sacrament of the Eucharist, not only during Mass, but also outside of it, reserving Consecrated Hosts with the utmost care, exposing them to solemn veneration, and carrying them processionaly to the joy of great crowds of the faithful.

In the ancient documents of the Church, we have many testimonies of this veneration (MF 56).

By the thirteenth century, a well-developed practice of adoring Christ in the Eucharist had developed within the Church. Recognizing the importance of such devotion to combat heresies and spiritual deprivation within society, Clement VIII issued a decree on November 25, 1592, in which he [established] in the city of Rome an uninterrupted course of prayer by the observation in the different churches of the devotion of the Forty Hours in such an order that at every hour of the day and night, the whole year round, the incense of prayer would ascend without interruption before the face of the Lord.²

Subsequent popes continued this important work of prayer, which has continued up to this century in the city of Rome. Furthermore, on August 20, 1885, Pope Leo XIII "ordered the solemn exposition and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament every day of October as part of the Rosary devotions when held in the evening in all parish churches."³

The 1917 Code of Canon Law distinguished between different forms of adoration, and encouraged them all to varying degrees. For example, “private exposition” referred to the use of a ciborium during exposition. In this form of adoration, the tabernacle is opened and the ciborium moved forward while remaining in the tabernacle. This form of adoration did not require permission and was allowed in any place the Blessed Sacrament was reserved.

“Public exposition” refers to the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament within a monstrance in full view of the faithful. Canon 1274 §2 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law allowed this form of adoration without permission on the Feast of Corpus Christi and every day within its octave. Public exposition during other times could occur for a just cause with the permission of the local ordinary. Furthermore, the decree of Pope Leo XIII noted above remained in force under the 1917 legislation. Finally, canon 1275 of the 1917 Code prescribed that the Forty Hours devotion was to be held in all places where the Blessed Sacrament was habitually reserved, particularly in parishes. The local ordinary was to determine the dates. If a place had too few faithful to maintain forty continuous hours of adoration, the obligation was adapted to allow some public exposition every day for three days. It seems the Church intended for each diocese what Clement VIII intended for the city of Rome.

By the time Pope Paul VI was elected to the See of Peter, continuous exposition beyond forty hours had become customary in certain places. This is commonly known as *perpetual adoration*. To protect the Blessed Sacrament from abuse and encourage this type of adoration, the Vatican Congregation of Rites promulgated the 1967 instruction *Eucharisticum Mysterium*. This document was cited and reaffirmed in the subsequent 1973 instruction *eucharistiae Sacramentum*, issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship. Both documents follow the general legislation of the 1917 Code and encourage adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in varying forms. These norms and directives became the substance of the 1983 Code of Canon Law and the liturgical legislation that has emerged since the new Code was promulgated. In addressing “continuous” or perpetual adoration, *Eucharistiae Sacramentum* notes two possibilities: adoration initiated by the faithful, and adoration initiated by the local bishop in which the faithful are ordered to participate. Regarding adoration initiated by the faithful, the instruction provides:

In churches where the eucharist is regularly 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 is not strictly continuous. In this way the local community may meditate on this mystery more deeply and adore.

This kind of exposition, however, may take place with the consent of the local Ordinary, only if there is assurance of the participation of a reasonable number of the faithful (no. 86).

By “reasonable number of the faithful,” the Church expects that the Blessed Sacrament will not be left unattended if exposed.

Regarding exposition ordered by the local bishop, *Eucharistiae Sacramentum* states:

For any serious and general need, the local Ordinary is empowered to order prayer before the blessed sacrament exposed for a more extended period of time in those churches to which the faithful come in large numbers (no. 87).

The term “serious and general need” refers to the determination by the local bishop that a particularly grave situation in his diocese requires the prayerful intervention by all. Clement VIII saw the need to protect the See of Rome from spiritual attacks by ordering Forty Hours devotions held in such a way that exposition was continuous.

A bishop today can do the same in his diocese for similar reasons. For example, some bishops in the United States are addressing their priest shortage by encouraging Eucharistic exposition and adoration in their dioceses and ordering it to be held in the cathedral church. They specifically request that these prayers be offered for vocations. By “larger numbers,” the instruction envisions the bishop’s ordering such adoration in large parishes only, lest his decree become a burden for the faithful in smaller parishes.

In short, if the faithful wish to have Eucharistic exposition and adoration, their desire to worship and adore is reason enough, assuming adequate participation. On the other hand, if the bishop were to order the faithful to participate in public, continuous exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, he would have to have a serious reason, and should only make the demand on the larger parishes. In both instances, flexibility

is provided if adequate numbers are not available. This flexibility is intended to encourage continuous exposition and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. As *Eucharistiae Sacramentum* notes:

Where there cannot be uninterrupted exposition because there is not a sufficient number of worshippers, 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 a day, for example, at midday and at night (no. 88).

Eucharisticum Mysterium also encourages Eucharistic congresses. In these gatherings, the faithful seek to understand more deeply the meaning and purpose of the Blessed Sacrament. They offer prayers and participate in devotions and processions. All they do is directed to the celebration of Mass and presence of Christ in the Eucharist. As the instruction notes, “All during a eucharistic congress of at least an entire region, it is proper to designate some churches for continuous adoration” (no. 67). Both Paul VI and John Paul II have attended many of the international Eucharistic congresses and encouraged the faithful to continue this important act of worship.

Promotion of Eucharistic Exposition

Pope John Paul II has strongly encouraged veneration of the Blessed Sacrament through Eucharistic exposition and adoration. As he stated during the forty-fifth International Eucharistic Congress in Spain,

In fact, the *continual adoration*—which took place in many churches throughout the city, and in some even at night—was an enriching feature that distinguished this Congress. If only this form of adoration, which ends tonight in a solemn Eucharistic vigil, would continue in the future too, so that in all the parishes and Christian communities the custom of some form of adoration of the Eucharist might take root.⁴

Following the encouragement of our Holy Father, we can do several things to foster Eucharistic adoration, particularly exposition. We should worship the Most Holy Eucharist at every opportunity. At the very least, opportunity exists every time we pass a church in which the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. Saint Philip Neri could not pass a church without stopping for a visit and, if locked, he would pray at the door. Because of his efforts, Forty Hours devotion spread through the parishes in Rome, even before the decree of Clement VIII. Following the example of so great a saint, we could express our intimate love for Our Eucharistic Lord by making an ejaculatory prayer with the Sign of the Cross every time we pass a church. Such acts keep us focused on our Eucharistic Lord and make us docile to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

If exposition of the Blessed Sacrament does not occur regularly in your parish, approach the pastor and request it. First, spend some time every day for thirty days in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Become accustomed to scheduled visits. Meditate on His Real Presence. Study the documents of the Church that discuss this subject. In this way, you will be prepared both spiritually and mentally to approach your pastor, answer his questions, and accept his decisions.

We must be docile to the decision of our bishop concerning Eucharistic exposition:

The bishop is responsible for all matters pertaining to the right ordering of the celebration of the Eucharist and adoration and devotion to the Eucharist outside Mass. It is his duty to promote and guide the liturgical life of the diocese. Consequently, he alone determines the pastoral appropriateness of perpetual exposition in his diocese and accordingly may permit it or not and may limit the number of places where it takes place.⁵

If exposition already occurs in your parish or a neighboring parish, become involved. If already involved, try to arouse interest in having a local Eucharistic congress. This will help spread the word about Eucharistic exposition and increase devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.

Most importantly, do not neglect to attend Mass. Attendance during the week, if possible, is a most important way to adore Our Lord and encourage devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. All our prayers and devotions must be directed to this greatest of prayers. As Pope Paul VI exhorts us in *Mysterium Fidei*:

It is to be desired that the faithful, every day and in great numbers, actively participate in the Sacrifice of the Mass, receive Holy Communion with a pure heart, and give thanks to Christ Our Lord for so great a gift. Let them remember these words: “The desire of Jesus Christ and of the Church that all

the faithful receive daily Communion means above all that through the sacramental union with God they may obtain the strength necessary for mastering their passions, for purifying themselves of their daily venial faults and for avoiding the grave sins to which human frailty is exposed” (MF 66).

Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

1. *Am I generous with my time when it comes to prayer before the Blessed Sacrament?*
2. Vatican II teaches that the sacred liturgy is the source and summit of the Christian life. How do I understand and put into practice this teaching? What role does Eucharistic adoration outside Mass have in living out this teaching?
3. Is Eucharistic adoration with exposition available in my area? Do I take advantage of this opportunity? What can I do to foster the spread of Eucharistic adoration?

¹ Very Reverend H. A. Ayrinhac, D.C. L., *Administrative Legislation in the New Code of Canon Law* (Longman’s, Green and Co.) 1930, vol. 3, 132-136.

² Decree of Clement VIII, *Graves et Diuturnae*, as quoted in: *Ibid.*, p. 150.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁴ Address to the 45th International Eucharistic Congress in Spain, no. 2; *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, June 23, 1993, 4, emphasis original).

⁵ “Perpetual Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament,” Newsletter of the United States Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy (June 1995), Vol. XXI, 22.

To learn more about how you can get perpetual adoration with exposition at your parish, or if you would like to become a full-time or part-time lay advocate of perpetual adoration with exposition, write Barth Bracy at Perpetual Adoration Worldwide Mission (PAWM), P.O. Box 42808-158, Houston, TX 77242-2808; or email him at PAWM 2000@AOL.COM. To promote perpetual adoration with exposition, you can also write the Association of Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration, 660 Club View Dr., Los Angeles, CA 90024-2624; (310) 273-3856.

RECOMMENDED READING

Holy Bible

Catechism of the Catholic Church (Paperback and hardback available)

Vatican II Documents, Vol. I

Mysterium Fidei; Encyclical Letter by Pope Paul VI

Eucharistiae Sacramentum; Congregation for Divine Worship, Instruction

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Catholics United for the Faith
827 N. Fourth St.
Steubenville, OH 43952
(800) 693-2484