



One must not forget the primary office of priests, who have been consecrated by their ordination to represent Christ

the Priest: for this reason their hands, like their words and their will, have become the direct instruments of Christ. Through this fact, that is, as ministers of the Holy Eucharist, they have a primary responsibility for the sacred species, because it is a total responsibility: they offer the bread and wine, they consecrate it, and then they distribute the sacred species to the participants in the assembly who wish to receive them. Deacons can only bring to the altar the offerings of the faithful and, once they have been consecrated by the priest, distribute them. How eloquent, therefore, even if not of ancient custom, is the rite of the anointing of the hands in our Latin ordination, as though precisely for these hands a special grace and power of the Holy Spirit is necessary! To touch the sacred species and to distribute them with their own hands is a privilege of the ordained, one which indicates an active participation in the ministry of the Eucharist.

*Pope John Paul II (1980)*

The non-ordained faithful already collaborate with the sacred ministers in diverse pastoral situations, since “this wonderful gift of the Eucharist, which is the greatest gift of all, demands that such an important mystery should be increasingly better known and its saving power more fully shared.” Such liturgical service is a response to the objective needs of the faithful, especially those of the sick, and to those liturgical assemblies in which there are particularly large numbers of the faithful who wish to receive Holy Communion.

§1. The canonical discipline concerning extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion must be correctly applied so as to avoid generating confusion. The same discipline establishes that **the ordinary minister of Holy Communion is the Bishop, the Priest and the Deacon.** Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are those instituted as acolytes and the faithful so deputed in accordance with Canon 230, §3. A non-ordained member of the faithful, **in cases of true necessity**, may be deputed by the diocesan bishop, using the appropriate form of blessing for these situations, to act as an extraordinary minister to distribute Holy Communion outside of liturgical celebrations *ad actum vel ad tempus* or for a more stable period. In exceptional cases or in unforeseen circumstances, the priest presiding at the liturgy may authorize such *ad actum*.

§2. Extraordinary ministers may distribute Holy Communion at Eucharistic celebrations **only when there are no ordained ministers present or when those ordained ministers present at a liturgical celebration are truly unable to distribute Holy Communion.** They may also exercise this function at Eucharistic celebrations where there are **particularly large numbers of the faithful** and which would be **excessively prolonged because of an insufficient number of ordained ministers** to distribute Holy Communion. This function is supplementary and extraordinary and must be exercised in accordance with the norm of law. It is thus useful for the diocesan bishop to issue particular norms concerning extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion which, **in complete harmony with the universal law of the Church**, should regulate the exercise of this function in his diocese. Such norms should provide, amongst other things, for matters such as the instruction in Eucharistic doctrine of those chosen to be extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, the meaning of the service they provide, the ru-

brics to be observed, the reverence to be shown for such an august Sacrament and instruction concerning the discipline on admission to Holy Communion.

To avoid creating confusion, **certain practices are to be avoided and eliminated where such have emerged in particular Churches ... [including] the habitual use of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at Mass, thus arbitrarily extending the concept of “a great number of the faithful.”**

*Ecclesia de Mysterio*

Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests, (1997)

The practice of Holy Communion under both kinds at Mass continued until the late eleventh century, when the custom of distributing the Eucharist to the faithful under the form of bread alone began to grow. By the twelfth century theologians such as Peter Cantor speak of Communion under one kind as a “custom” of the Church. This practice spread until the Council of Constance in 1415 decreed that Holy Communion under the form of bread alone would be distributed to the faithful. **In practice, the need to avoid obscuring the role of the priest and the deacon as the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion by an excessive use of extraordinary ministers might in some circumstances constitute a reason either for limiting the distribution of Holy Communion under both species or for using intinction instead of distributing the Precious Blood from the chalice.**

U.S. Bishops, *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds* (2001)

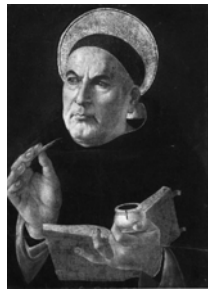


The Lord gave me, and gives me still, such faith in priests who live according to the rite of the holy Roman Church because of their orders that, were they to persecute me, I would still want to have recourse to them....And I act in this way because, in this world, I see nothing physically of the most high Son of God except His most holy Body and Blood which they receive and *they alone administer to others*. I want to have these most holy mysteries honored and venerated above all things and I want to reserve them in precious places.

*St. Francis of Assisi*

The dispensation of Christ's body pertains to a priest for three reasons. First indeed because, as was said, he himself consecrates in the person of Christ. Now Christ Himself, just as He consecrated His body at the Supper, so also He gave it to others to be eaten. Hence just as the consecration of Christ's body pertains to a priest, so also the dispensation pertains to him. Second, because a priest is set up as an intermediary between God and the people. Hence as it pertains to him to offer the people's gifts to God, so also it pertains to him to deliver the divinely sanctified gifts to the people. Third, because in reverence for this sacrament, it is touched by nothing except what is consecrated; hence also the corporal and the cup are consecrated, and similarly the priest's hands, for touching this sacrament. Hence no others are permitted to touch it, except in necessity, for instance if it fell on the ground, or in some other case of necessity.

*St. Thomas Aquinas*



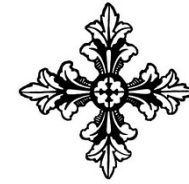
A deacon, being as it were near to the priestly order, participates something of his office, namely so that he dispenses the blood; but not the body, except in necessity, when a bishop or a priest commands it. First, indeed, because Christ's blood is contained in a vessel. Hence it is not necessary that it be touched by the one dispensing it, as the body of Christ is touched. Second, because the blood indicates the redemption which flows from Christ down into the people; hence also the blood is mixed with water, which signifies the people. And since deacons are in between the priest and the people, the dispensation of the blood fits more with deacons than the dispensation of the body.

*St. Thomas Aquinas*



In the reception of the sacrament, there has always been a custom in the Church of God that the laity receive communion from priests, but that priests, when celebrating, administer communion to themselves; this custom, coming down as from apostolic tradition, should rightly and deservedly be retained.

*Council of Trent, Session XIII, chapter 8*



# THE CHURCH & HER SAINTS SPEAK about **Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion**

