

MEMORANDUM



ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE
of Calgary

DATE March 19, 2021
TO Priests, Deacons, and Parish Office Staff
FROM Fr. Nathan Siray and Fr. Wilbert Chin Jon
SUBJECT Altar of Repose – Holy Thursday

In response to recent inquiries made about the Altar of Repose and practice of adoration after the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, the following are points of clarification in regards to this practice of our faith which is to spend time with our Eucharistic Lord in commemoration of the evening he spent in the Garden of Gethsemane.

- 1) Please refer to Page 293 of the Roman Missal for the description of the Transfer of the Most Blessed Sacrament to the Altar of Repose. Please note that this year the Altar of Repose is to be set up in the sanctuary and not a separate location in the church building.
- 2) At rubrics 38 and 39 of page 293 of the Roman Missal for the Mass of the Lord's Supper, it states that the ciborium filled with consecrated hosts, that will be received the following day during the Commemoration of the Passion of the Lord, is brought to the Altar of Repose to be placed inside the tabernacle.

Note that these rubrics do not mention or suggest that the transfer of the ciborium to the Altar of Repose can be replaced or supplemented by the placement of the Eucharist in the monstrance and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament from the monstrance occur at the Altar of Repose.

- 3) The Eucharistic species that is adored at the Altar of Repose is to be the hosts contained in the ciborium and kept safe in the tabernacle at this location. The substitution or addition of having the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance, alongside the ciborium, is not envisioned during this time of adoration nor should this be done.
- 4) For this reason, parishes in the Diocese of Calgary that may have been accustomed to having the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the monstrance at the Altar of Repose on Holy Thursday are asked to discontinue this practice.

The appendix on the subject matter has been provided for those who are interested in examining it in more detail.

For questions related to liturgy, you may email Fr. Nathan Siray at Nathan.Siray@calgarydiocese.ca or Fr. Wilbert Chin Jon at Wilbert.ChinJon@calgarydiocese.ca

Appendix

Altar of Repose

Author: Father Edward McNamara

A ZENIT DAILY DISPATCH

ROME, 15 MARCH 2005 (ZENIT)

Answered by Father Edward McNamara, professor of liturgy at the Regina Apostolorum Pontifical University.

Q: What should be the atmosphere of the altar of repose for Maundy Thursday? Should it be an atmosphere of grandeur since the Lord instituted the Eucharist and the priesthood? Or should it be solemn, as we recall the Lord's agony in the garden?

Since the renovation in 1999, our tabernacle has been transferred to the side altar. Now it's not very visible as it is blocked away by huge pillars. I feel it has lost its significant especially during the Maundy Thursday's liturgy. Before, the priest transferred the Eucharist from the central tabernacle, which was behind the main altar, to the side altar. Now the Eucharist goes back into the same tabernacle on Holy Thursday as there isn't another suitable place for an altar of repose. As a designer, I feel I should do something to highlight the tabernacle for this special night.

Our new tabernacle now sits independently on an old altar at the side. Now the question is to decorate the altar of repose — is it wrong to cover the entire tabernacle and the old altar with a huge piece of translucent white linen that touches the floor? The tabernacle, under the translucent veil, is still visible as it has a powerful light shining from within. This creates a very solemn look. The idea represents the Lord in his suffering state — being submitted into human hands and is moving on into his passion and death. To me, that's a very powerful visual but some feel it's too abstract. Could you please comment? — V.C., Singapore

A: The place of reposition should be as beautiful as possible and should be sufficiently prominent so as to allow for adoration, even by large groups, following the Mass of the Lord's Supper.

In 1988 the Holy See published "Paschales Solemnitatis," a "Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Feasts."

No. 49 of this document refers to our topic: "For the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, a place should be prepared and adorned in such a way as to be conducive to prayer and meditation, seriousness appropriate to the liturgy of these days is enjoined so that all abuses are avoided or suppressed.

"When the tabernacle is located in a chapel separated from the central part of the church, it is appropriate to prepare the place of repose and adoration there."

With respect to the last point I would say that if the abovementioned chapel is too small to accommodate the faithful who visit on Holy Thursday, then a separate place of reposition may be prepared.

The case you describe is not a separate chapel, but a separate altar and so, if possible, it would be more appropriate to prepare another place for the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament.

Should there be no other option, then the procession bringing the Eucharist to this tabernacle should at least take a longer route within the Church so as to give meaning to this rite.

The altar of repose need not be a real altar and is often a temporary structure. In some places it is customary to make the place of reposition resemble an altar while others prefer locating the tabernacle on a column to make it stand out more clearly.

If a spare tabernacle is not available, the norms permit the use of a closed ciborium, though constant supervision must be assured in order to avoid any danger of profanation. Exposition with a monstrance is never permitted on Holy Thursday.

The decoration of the altar of repose should be special, At least four or six candles or lamps, and preferably more, should burn around it and should be tastefully arranged with flowers, drapes, fine cloths, carpets and a judicious use of subdued electric lighting in order to create the necessary ambiance of silence and meditation.

In those countries where it is possible, wheat stalks and young olive trees may also be incorporated into the decoration in order to evoke the themes of Eucharist and the garden of Gethsemane.

"Paschales Solemnitatis," No. 55, reflecting the liturgical reform, specifies: "The place where the tabernacle or pyx is situated must not be made to resemble a tomb, and the expression 'tomb' is to be avoided. The chapel of repose is not prepared so as to represent the 'Lord's burial' but for the custody of the eucharistic bread that will be distributed in Communion on Good Friday."

Any crosses or images that might be behind the tabernacle should be concealed using curtains or drapes of white, gold or some similar hue so that nothing distracts from the tabernacle.

With respect to your specific point of having the tabernacle visible behind a translucent cloth, I think that it is not a good option as the point of the place of reposition is to emphasize the tabernacle on this night. If it is not possible to move the tabernacle, then I am sure that a creative rearrangement of the cloths is possible.

"Paschales Solemnitatis," No. 56, briefly evokes the prevailing atmosphere for the adoration before the altar of repose: "After the Mass of the Lord's Supper the faithful should be encouraged to spend a suitable period of time during the night in the church in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament which has been solemnly reserved. Where appropriate, this prolonged Eucharistic adoration may be accompanied by the reading of some part of the Gospel of St. John (chapters 13-17).

"From midnight onwards, however, the adoration should be made without external solemnity, because the day of the Lord's passion has begun."

Thus the ambience should be meditative and silent. Even special activities organized for young people should strive to respect this spiritual climate, interspersing silence, brief readings, commentary and one or two meditative hymns or chants relating to the mystery being celebrated. ZE05031521

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Follow-up: Altar of Repose [04-05-2005]

Two inquiries touched on the March 15 column regarding the altar of repose.

A woman religious writing from Kenya asks: "Though the answer mentions that after the midnight of Maundy Thursday there should be no solemnity with regard the altar of repose, there is no clear indication that our attention should also focus on the reading and meditation on the Passion of Our Lord. There are 364 days of the year in which we ought to give due prayerful attention to the Eucharistic mystery. And this reaches the climax on Maundy Thursday. But then could it not be explicitly stated that after the midnight of Maundy Thursday our entire attention should be on the Passion of Our Lord and thus also helping in the better understanding of the term altar of repose?"

The question turns on what is meant by "no solemnity" after midnight on Holy or Maundy Thursday (Maundy is probably derived from the Latin antiphon "Mandatum Novum," or New Commandment, which was sung during the Washing of Feet).

The lack of solemnity effectively means that after Midnight Good Friday has begun, attention should be turned toward the Lord's Passion. Therefore, public prayers should not be organized at the altar of repose after this time and in some places the number of lighted candles is reduced.

Likewise, if the Divine Office is prayed in church on Good Friday it should be celebrated in the main body of the building, not at the altar of repose.

It does not preclude however, any traditional private devotions and visits to the tabernacle nor, strictly speaking, would it exclude organizing turns of adoration to accompany the tabernacle, especially in those places where it is traditional to leave the church open all night or where the circumstances make it necessary to always have someone present to prevent profanation.

Certainly, even in such private visits, attention should be centered more on the mystery of the Passion than on the Eucharistic mystery.

Before the liturgical celebration of the Passion begins, all but the two candles to be brought to the altar for Communion should be extinguished and any electric lighting turned off.

Another correspondent, writing from the Fiji Islands, asks: "What ought to be the practice regarding an 'altar of repose' from Holy Thursday until Easter at chapels (e.g., convent chapels or small mission churches) that are not having Holy Week services?"

According to the Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of the Easter Feasts, "Paschales Solemnitatis," No. 54:

"After the post-Communion prayer, the procession forms, with the crossbar at its head. The Blessed Sacrament, accompanied by lighted candles and incense, is carried through the church to the place of reservation, to the singing of the hymn 'Pange lingua' or some other eucharistic song. This rite of transfer of the Blessed Sacrament may not be carried out if the Liturgy of the Lord's Passion will not be celebrated in that same church on the following day."

Thus, chapels that do not have Holy Week services do not set up an altar of repose.

On Holy Thursday afternoon the Eucharist should be removed from the tabernacle and locked away in a dignified and secure place until Easter Sunday. A lamp should be lit in the room, but no public veneration or visits are allowed.

For this reason No. 43 of the above-mentioned document says:

"It is fitting that small religious communities both clerical and lay, and other lay groups should participate in the celebration of the Easter Triduum in neighboring principal churches.

"Similarly where the number of participants and ministers is so small that the celebrations of the Easter Triduum cannot be carried out with the requisite solemnity, such groups of the faithful should assemble in a larger church.

"Also where there are small parishes with only one priest, it is recommended that such parishes should assemble, as far as possible, in a principal church and there participate in the celebrations.

"According to the needs of the faithful, where a pastor has the responsibility for two or more parishes in which the faithful assemble in large numbers, and where the celebrations can be carried out with the requisite care and solemnity, the celebrations of the Easter Triduum may be repeated in accord with the given norms." ZE05040521

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