

Purifying the Sacred Vessels After Communion –

Taking Care of Christ's Body

Once the distribution of Holy Communion is over, you will notice that the priest combines the remaining hosts (the bread that has become the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus) into a golden [or silver] looking container, which is called a ciborium (si--bohr--ee--uhm). The ciborium is placed in the tabernacle, and every Catholic church will always have a candle burning (commonly red in color) to signify and remind us that Jesus is present there and waiting for us inside of every Catholic Church around the entire world.

At most Sunday Masses, there are often still a few other empty ciboria and one or more chalices that need to be purified or ritually cleansed before Mass is over. This sacred action is very practical, but we shouldn't miss the deeply spiritual meaning to what is happening on the altar. Purifying or cleaning the sacred vessels is one beautiful way that we as Catholics are enacting our faith in Jesus' true presence in the Eucharist. It will always be either a Catholic Priest or a Catholic Deacon, but he should be carefully using water and little cloths called *purificators* to move any tiny fragments of the hosts into the chalice as well as dry off the water that is used to cleanse these vessels as much as possible. When the priest or deacon drinks the remaining water from the chalice (which during purification will usually contain both fragments of the Eucharist and any drops of the wine that has become the precious blood still left in the chalice), he will say a very beautiful prayer during that moment in the Mass:

***“What has passed our lips as food, O Lord, may we possess in purity of heart,
that what has been given to us in time may be our healing for eternity.”***

This prayer is beautiful for many reasons, but there are a couple images that I think can help really pray through this moment and the importance of it at Mass. First of all, I think about the real power of even the tiniest fragment or drop of the Eucharist for our spiritual good. There have been many Christians over the last 2,000 years that were willing to die for the sake of attending a Catholic Mass and just partaking of the bread of life, Jesus' very self, given to us in communion, one last time. We could picture it as a tiny ball of energy or fire, almost like a nuclear reaction of spiritual power. If that type of power really was laying as a fragment on the altar or in a sacred vessel, we wouldn't just discard it without any care. Of course, the power of a nuclear reaction is actually reduced to nothing when compared to the true spiritual power of God's love and His very life. This is what is given to us in communion, and this is what we are taking care not to discard or throw away without a second thought. His burning love for us is present in even small little fragments or droplets of the Eucharist, so we rightly take care to preserve or purify them in a dignified manner.

Finally, the last image I sometimes think of during purification would be Jesus' body after he has died on the cross and as they are getting Him ready for burial. Some of his closest followers and disciples were present during these moments, the Apostle John, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and a few others. How much love and care did they take in wrapping his body in a linen cloth and making during lay him gently in that new tomb. Of course, we are not just taking care of Jesus' dead body during this moment in the Mass, but instead, we are taking care of Jesus' resurrected and alive body, blood, soul, and divinity, which is given for our sake to heal, transform, purify, and raise us up for eternal life! May we thank God for this great gift once again, and may we ask Him to help remind us of His burning love for us in Holy Communion, which is true even in the tiniest fragment of the host.