

Tridentine Community News

May 17, 2009

De Defectibus – Part 4 of 4

We conclude our presentation of the 1962 Roman Missal instruction, *De Defectibus* (On Defects Occurring in the Celebration of Mass), which displays the Church's concern for the Blessed Sacrament and the validity of the Eucharist that the faithful may receive.

X. Defects Occurring in the Celebration of the Rite Itself (*con't.*)

41. If the Blood freezes in the chalice in winter time, the chalice should be wrapped in cloths that have been warmed. If this is not enough, it should be placed in boiling water near the altar until the Blood melts, but care should be taken that none of the water gets into the chalice.

42. If any of the Blood of Christ falls, if it is only a drop or so, nothing need be done except to pour a little water over the spilled drops and dry it afterwards with a purificator. If more has been spilled, the corporal or the altar cloth or other place is to be washed in the best way possible, and the water is then to be poured into the sacrarium.

43. If, however, all the Blood is spilled after the Consecration, the little that remains is to be consumed, and the procedure described above is to be followed with the rest which has been spilled. But if none at all remains, the priest is to put wine and water into the chalice again and consecrate from the words *Símili modo, postquam cenátum est*, etc., after first making an offering of the chalice, as above.

44. If anyone vomits the Eucharist, the vomit is to be gathered up and disposed of in some decent place.

45. If a consecrated Host or any Particle of it falls to the ground or floor, it is to be taken up reverently, a little water is to be poured over the place where it fell, and the place is to be dried with a purificator. If it falls on clothing, the clothing need not be washed. If it falls on a woman's clothing, the woman herself is to take the Particle and consume it.

46. Defects may occur in the celebration of the rite itself also if the priest does not know the rites and ceremonies to be observed, all of which have been fully described in the above rubrics.

Commentary – Is All of This Really Necessary?

Some might claim that this is the liturgical equivalent of a nun's slap of the ruler on a student's knuckles. But let us consider that the Ordinary Form Missal does not have an equivalent preamble. It only contains the General Instructions of the Roman Missal, equivalent to the Rubrics of the Roman Missal. The only formal instructions are positive (what one must do), not negative (what one must not do).

In his book, *Liturgical Question Box*, Bishop Peter Elliott addresses the lack of such a section by citing and reapplying the

original points in *De Defectibus* to the modern realities and requirements of the Ordinary Form Mass. For example, he states that when there are additional vessels to be consecrated when the Precious Blood is to be distributed to the faithful at Mass, the requirement to have all of the vessels on the corporal on the altar in order to be validly consecrated no longer makes sense. Simply to have the vessels on the altar, and for the celebrant to have the intention to consecrate them, is sufficient for a valid consecration. This is indeed logical; after all, a corporal should not have the dimensions of a towel.

The trouble with such a proposition is that while Bishop Elliott is without a doubt one of the top living scholars of the rubrics of the Ordinary Form of Mass, he speaks with no authority other than his own scholarship. He is speculating as to what the Church intends, no matter how logically. For such an important topic as the rubrics of Holy Mass, it is peculiar that clearer official guidelines have simply disappeared in the new Missal.

Fortunately, *De Defectibus* is still in force for the Extraordinary Form of Holy Mass. If you don't identify the potential problems, how can you correct them? We might find certain examples to sound dated, but standards for the Sacred Liturgy do need to be set. What's worse, chuckling over the absurdity of how unlikely some of the circumstances mentioned in *De Defectibus* are to occur, or being presented with potentially invalid matter at Holy Communion?

Proof of the Existence of Particles of the Host

On a recent day, the sun was so bright that one could see dust floating in the air. This, coupled with some recent discussion on a liturgical blog, inspired an experiment. Your author took an unconsecrated priest's host, and under the sun's bright rays, against a black background, broke the host in two just as the priest does before Holy Communion. The bright sunlight revealed a shower of tiny, dust-sized particles emanating from the host.

When we empty a bag of new, unconsecrated hosts into a ciborium before Mass, there are almost always crumbs and broken hosts in the bag. Think about the last time you opened a large box of cookies – weren't one or two a little crumbly? It is therefore within reason to think that as Holy Communion is being distributed to the faithful from a ciborium, a crumb may fall when a particular Host is lifted out of the ciborium.

While we don't advocate a hyperbaric chamber around the celebrant of Holy Mass or similar impractical extremes, we do believe that this experiment provides yet more evidence of the benefit of distribution of Holy Communion on the tongue, accompanied by a server holding a paten. It's simply responsible: it's the liturgical equivalent of swabbing alcohol on the spot where a nurse is going to draw blood. In the latter case germs, and in the former case Particles of our Lord, will still be there, whether we see them or not, or acknowledge them or not. Fortunately, the Extraordinary Form of Holy Mass strives to avoid accidental sacrilege via its prescriptions for careful handling of the Blessed Sacrament at all points in the liturgy.