

Tridentine Community News

November 25, 2007

Frontals

From time to time, you may see a decorative cloth hanging down the front side of our high altar. Known as a frontal or *antependium*, these cloths are recommended but not mandated. As one sees them put up more frequently for important feasts such as Christmas and Easter, they serve as a sign of the solemnity of the occasion. They must reflect the liturgical color of the day, or the generic gold, and may be enhanced with patterns or pious words.

In somewhat of a twist of irony, frontals are more likely to be used in churches whose altars have ornate front designs of their own. Logically, a decorative frontal would seem to have greater utility on a plain altar.

Both St. Josaphat and Assumption Churches are attempting to refurbish as well as make some frontals to be used on certain occasions.

An interesting side note: The tabernacle veil, too, if present, must reflect the liturgical color of the day. However, it can never be black. Black is the color of a Requiem Mass, but our Lord is not dead in the tabernacle. Rather, when black is the color of the day, the tabernacle veil is to be violet, the liturgical color of penitence, and a sign of Christ's Living Presence in the Blessed Sacrament.

The Communion Rail Cloth

Thanks to the sewing skills of a member of the Windsor Tridentine Mass Community, Assumption Church will soon have a Communion Rail Cloth that will be placed over the top of the altar rail before the distribution of Holy Communion. St. Josaphat has had one for some time now, and hopefully St. Joseph will be



able to procure one soon.

Formerly mandatory, and even today highly recommended, a Communion Rail Cloth is not often seen nowadays. In the past, it stood on its own: If a church did not have a Communion Rail, servers would hold a cloth taut beneath the chins of communicants to protect against Hosts dropping onto the floor. Rubrics expert

Dr. Alcuin Reid insisted on such an arrangement at last year's C.I.E.L. conference in Oxford, England, held in a chapel without an altar rail, as you can see in the accompanying photo.

A Communion Rail Cloth covering an altar rail serves as a form of backup protection: Just as a paten is held under the communicant's mouth to catch a dropped Host or Fragment, the Communion Cloth is intended to catch any Particles that may not fall onto the paten. It is less likely that a Host will bounce off the soft cloth onto the floor than off the hard surface of the Communion Rail itself.

Contrast this act of reverence for the Sacred Species with the casual attitudes that prevail in distribution of Holy Communion in many churches today. It is one thing to permit laypeople to serve as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, but it is quite another to perform the distribution without a paten to protect against fallen Hosts or Particles. Combine this with the usual Communion line, and the opportunity for sacrilege by stepping on dropped Hosts becomes significant.

One of the benefits the Extraordinary Form of the Mass brings to the Church is reminding the faithful of the reverence due to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. If the Eucharist is truly central to our faith, then we must make efforts to minimize the possibility of sacrilege against our Lord present in each and every Host.

Some Practical Matters

When you kneel at the Communion Rail, hold your hands under the cloth and create more surface area with it. Should the Host fall, let it fall onto the cloth rather than onto your hands.

At St. Josaphat, the Communion Rail Cloth is attached with Velcro loops to a mounting rail on the back side. At Assumption, the Communion Rail is solid marble and does not have a method to secure the cloth. The cloth will simply be placed over the rail. Therefore, at Assumption, please do not tug on the cloth as you kneel or stand up. You could inadvertently pull the cloth over and off the rail. To reduce the possibility that people will be tempted to pull on the cloth, use of the Communion Rail Cloth will be introduced after kneeler pads are made that make it easier for you to kneel and stand up on your own. We will also investigate creative ways to secure the cloth without damaging the rail.

If you notice a Fragment of the Blessed Sacrament lying on the Communion Rail Cloth, bring it to the attention of the priest or deacon distributing Communion. Let us endeavor to avoid having a Host fall onto the floor when the Communion Rail Cloth is removed after Holy Communion. Likewise, should you ever see a Host on the ground, bring it to a priest's attention, after Mass if not during the distribution of Communion. There are procedures for reverently disposing of such a Host and purifying the affected area afterwards. If we reverence our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament enough to have the ceremony of Benediction, we should also take care to prevent Him from being trampled upon.

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