



At one time, the practice of utilizing a service of the Word followed by Communion had become a common practice in a number of parishes. Reasons vary but generally these services were used when a priest was away from the parish for a meeting or for when he took a day off. Having become more familiar with the practice of a Communion Service as a result of the need to utilize Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest (SCAP), some parishes incorporated the same ritual for use on weekdays.

While I appreciate the sensitivity, regular use of a weekday Service of the Word followed by Communion on weekdays unwittingly undermines the importance and centrality of the Eucharistic sacrifice. In the Eucharistic sacrifice we celebrate our participation in the Paschal Mystery. Through the Eucharistic Prayer, the Holy Spirit brings about the sacramental reality of the sacrifice of the cross. Thus, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross enters our own time and place. It is not a new sacrifice, but an anamnesis, a re-presentation of an event that happened once and for all. In this light, the Eucharistic Prayer is understood as more than a means to consecrate bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ so that the faithful may receive them. Holy Communion obviously is a part of the ritual - an essential part - but it can not be divorced from its essential connection with the sacrifice of the Mass. The reception of Holy Communion can properly be understood only as it is connected with the celebration of the Mass. Holy Communion is a conclusion to the sacrifice and the means through which we fully participate in it.

The simplest solution to the problem in parishes with resident priests is simply to offer a parish Mass daily. It is my presumption that parishes with resident priests will have a daily Mass. This is not always possible such as when a priest must be away for a legitimate reason. In rural settings, it is often impossible to have a daily Mass given the distance a priest may live from the church.

There are several pastoral implications and challenges with use of SCAP during weekdays. First, according to the G.I.R.M. (#85), we are to take seriously the instruction to distribute the Eucharist consecrated at the Mass people actually attend. The reserved Sacrament is not really intended for distribution at Mass. Circumstances obviously require it at times, such as when the number of communicants have been underestimated, but using Eucharist reserved in the Tabernacle during Mass should be a rarity. While not wanting to overstate the case, doing so tends to convey that the reception of Communion stands on its own and thus it presents a disconnect between the sacrifice of the Mass and reception of Communion. The purpose of the Mass is not solely to provide consecrated Hosts for distribution.

Secondly, there is definite need for Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest in some of our rural parishes for Sunday or Holy Day celebrations. At these celebrations, parishioners should receive reinforcement about the essential connection between the Mass and Communion. SCAP is not intended to be normative but is a pastoral solution because of a limited availability of priests for Sundays and Holy Days.

## POLICY FOR PARISH WEEKDAY WORSHIP

Diocese of Great Falls-Billings

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Thirdly, weekday services of the Word followed by Communion began out of a desire for those who were accustomed to attending weekday Mass and receiving Holy Communion daily. This was a laudable desire. However, when the Holy See responded to the request of Bishops to provide a ritual for Sundays in the absence of a priest, the response envisioned only Sundays and Holy Days. According to *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (#166), **“The diocesan Bishop must not easily grant permission for such celebrations to be held on weekdays, especially in places where it is possible or would be possible to have the celebration of Mass on the preceding or following Sunday.”**

The Liturgy of the Hours is actually the proper ritual to be used during weekdays when Mass is not available. It is the official prayer of the Church though it has not been utilized in parishes. Each parish would do well to provide opportunity for Morning and Evening Prayer, especially since they need not be led by an ordained minister.

Fourth, more parishes have implemented devotional practices such as weekly Eucharistic Adoration and Exposition, Perpetual Adoration and Benediction. Pope Benedict XVI strongly supported such devotions and devotional practices. In his encyclical letter, *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, Pope John Paul II stated that, “It is the responsibility of Pastors to encourage, also by their personal witness, the practice of Eucharistic adoration, and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in particular, as well as prayer of adoration before Christ present under the Eucharistic species” (#25).

Promulgated this 1st day of January 2020  
Most Reverend Michael W. Warfel  
Bishop of Great Falls-Billings