



WEEKDAY WORSHIP IN THE ABSENCE OF THE PRIEST

Diocese of Great Falls-Billings

When a priest is not available for Mass during a week day, the Liturgy of the Hours or a common devotional form of prayer, such as the Rosary, is to be utilized. It is not appropriate to utilize Word and Communion services on weekdays. Ministry to facilities such as nursing homes is guided by the Pastoral Care of the Sick.

The practice of utilizing a service of the Word followed by Communion has been a common practice for a number of years in a number of parishes and missions in the Diocese. While common, however, it has not been universally practiced. Reasons vary for its use but generally these services have been used when a priest is called away from the parish for a meeting or for when he takes a day off. In more recent years, some parishes have incorporated the same ritual used for Sundays, i.e., Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest. There are obviously a good number of the faithful who rightfully look forward to daily reception of Communion, especially since the number of priests from earlier years made it possible for Mass to be regularly celebrated in many of our communities. This is no longer the case.

During discussion with the Diocesan Liturgical Commission last year, concern was expressed that regular use of a weekday Service of the Word followed by Communion unwittingly undermines the importance and centrality of the Eucharistic Sacrifice during which we celebrate our participation in the Paschal Mystery. This element of sacrifice, so central to the Mass, indicates that the Eucharistic Prayer is more than a means to consecrate bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ so that we may receive them. Holy Communion obviously is an essential part of the ritual, but it can not be divorced from its essential connection with the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Reception of Holy Communion can properly be understood only as it is connected with the celebration of the Mass. The simplest solution in parishes with resident priests is to offer a parish Mass daily. I ask that, as much as possible, parishes with a resident priest strive to schedule a daily Mass. In the two urban settings with multiple parishes and multiple priests, it would be possible for Mass to be available in at least one place in the city on a daily basis.

Given the diminishing number of priests available in the Diocese, making Mass available is a challenge in a number of places and/or contexts. As such, there will be an ongoing need for utilization of Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest in some of our parishes. In these parishes, parishioners should receive regular reinforcement about the essential connection between the Mass and Communion. SCAP is not intended to be normative but rather a pastoral solution to a limited availability of priests for Sundays and Holy Days. Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest is not envisioned for use in those urban communities in which Mass would be available in a variety of settings.



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The practice of weekday services of the Word followed by Communion began out of concern for those who attend daily Mass and were accustomed to receiving Holy Communion daily. When the Holy See responded to the request of bishops to provide a ritual for Sundays when a priest would not be available, 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.” Thus, it is not really appropriate to have Word and Communion services on weekdays. An exception to this would be those services that are held in facilities such as nursing homes and assisted care facilities. In these facilities, it should be noted that the ritual to be used is from the Pastoral Care of the Sick.

The Liturgy of the Hours is the proper ritual to be used during weekdays when Mass is not available. As the official prayer of the Church, an opportunity for Morning or Evening Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours should be provided in each parish, but especially on those occasions when Mass cannot be celebrated. Informing parishioners of this, and training parishioners how to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, will facilitate its usage. The Worship Office can provide needed assistance. Of course, other options may be used for communal prayer such as a Service of the Word using the daily readings or devotions such as the Rosary or Chaplet of Divine Mercy.

Promulgated by
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Diocese of Great Falls-Billings
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