

## A Word on Images and Decorum in the Adoration Chapel

After Pope Urban IV extended the Feast of Corpus Christi to the Universal Church in 1264, it became common to carry the Blessed Sacrament through the streets in a vessel called a monstrance during a solemn procession. The Eucharistic piety of the Middle Ages led to the faithful calling for the Sacred Host to be left upon the altar for an extended period of adoration after Mass, followed by a service of blessing with the Host called Benediction. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, many churches in major cities would alternate times of adoration. In 1537 in Milan, the practice of Forty Hours' Adoration was formalized, and the custom of extended periods of adoration spread all over Europe.

In 1731, Pope Clement XII issued what has come to be known as the *Clementine Instruction*, which expressed the church's spiritual and liturgical expectations for these periods of adoration. Although this document was made binding only for the Diocese of Rome, the Sacred Congregation for Rites made it clear that diocesan bishops were to implement the instruction as much as possible in their dioceses. The regulations after the liturgical reform of Vatican II published in the *Order for Exposition and Worship of the Most Holy Eucharist* do not seem to directly alter the substance of this instruction.

Adoration is a public liturgical act. Even though most of the prayer that goes on at adoration is quiet and private, it is not by nature a private devotion, but an extension of the great liturgical action of the Mass. Perpetual Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament has happily become more common in our own age, and often takes place in separate chapels reserved specifically for this ongoing liturgical action. The Church, as such, does not provide detailed instructions for the furnishing of these chapels where Adoration takes place. It is assumed that the instructions of the Second Vatican Council in *Sacrosanctum concilium*, the constitution on the sacred liturgy, are followed throughout the church building. Wherever the constitution does not address the specific situation of chapels for perpetual adoration, it is reasonable to assume that the *Clementine Instruction* provides pastors with the mind of the Church for the spaces where adoration is offered. At Prince of Peace, since we have adopted Pope Benedict XVI's theme of mutual enrichment of the two forms of the Roman Rite, we seek to be as faithful as possible to the *Clementine Instruction* in the chapel, in the spirit of the liturgy constitution governing the liturgical reform.

The instruction was boiled down to easily accessible regulations that can be found in various ceremonial manuals. In *Ceremonies of the Roman Rite*, noted liturgical scholar Adrian Fortescue explains:

“If there is a picture over the altar it is to be covered with a red or white hanging . . . all images close to the altar are to be covered . . . No relics or statues are to be placed on the altar . . . Over the altar in a prominent place is prepared a throne draped in white . . . around the throne or place where the monstrance will stand, wax candles are to burn continuously .

. . Flowers may be placed on or around the altar . . . the windows near the altar may be darkened to foster recollection . . . clerics wear cassock and surplice while watching, and white stole . . . during exposition bells should be rung every hour of the day and night . . .”<sup>1</sup>

In the section on Exposition and Benediction, he comments:

“It is better that any fixed image over the altar should be veiled, other images are to be removed, and relics may not be put on. The altar and tabernacle are vested in white and it is better to remove the cross. Twenty wax candles, or at least twelve, are to burn . . Flowers should be used with great restraint. Neither they nor the candles should be near the throne: the Sacred Host ought to stand out in a detached manner.”<sup>2</sup>

After Vatican II, the custom of celebrating Mass in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament exposed, a tradition called *coram Sanctissimo*, was derogated as contrary to the newness of the liturgical action. The current rite of exposition and benediction is simplified, but essentially the same as before. The Church no longer requires the *prostration*, or genuflection on both knees when entering and exiting a church where the sacrament is exposed.

In a chapel dedicated almost exclusively to perpetual Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament, it is reasonable to try to observe as much of the Clementine Instruction as possible. We do not have a Crucifix visible while Adoration is going on, because a symbol of the Body of Christ is not appropriate when the Real Body of Christ is present on the altar. Likewise, images of other saints detract from the central focus of the church, which is Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament. That is why in the chapel we observe the omission of extra images and the altar cross. The rules governing candles for Forty Hours do not envision the situation of perpetual adoration, so we have only two candles and the sanctuary lamp (as opposed to 20!) constantly lit. This is allowed by current liturgical law.

I just wanted you to know the reasoning behind some of the changes in the Adoration Chapel. Please remember that the chapel was designed as a daily Mass chapel for the celebration of Mass in the Ordinary Form, and as such was furnished accordingly. Now that it is used almost exclusively for Adoration, we now have a décor that matches the mind of the Church expressed in her ceremonial commentary on liturgical texts and law.

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian Fortescue, *Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described*. Fifteenth revised edition, 2009, Alcuin Reid, ed. London: Burns and Oates, pp. 396-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.