

November 17, 2008.

My dear brother priests,

RE: Instruction for God's people on the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*

*Beginning the first Sunday of Advent in 2003, I gave nine instructions on the implementation of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. Most of this page and most of these instructions are taken from my previous document. There are many new priests to the Diocese who are not aware of these instructions.*

The celebration of Mass and proclaiming God's Word are two of the highest priorities in our lives as priests. The Mass is the center of the Christian life, and we must do everything possible to be faithful to the norms of the Church, and to celebrate the liturgy reverently, so that God's people are truly nourished through Word, Sacrament, ritual, symbol, sign and song, to lead them to holiness so that the love of God is proclaimed, all the more, through their daily lives.

*I am issuing again these instructions to be given again to God's people, beginning the first Sunday of Advent.* Every pastor/administrator is to make these instructions available to God's people with their bulletins. Copy-ready instructions in both English and Spanish are available, as well as the instructions being sent by e-mail to our parishes. The instructions are not meant to be exhaustive. Each priest is asked to read the General Instruction personally to be sure all the matters are implemented, especially regarding the Furnishings, the Requisites and the Choice of the Mass, which I do not speak about in my instructions. Each priest should explain more fully from the pulpit each Sunday what is being discussed in the instruction, and implement any changes needed by the following Sunday, if the norms are not being followed. This explanation is not to take the place of the homily, and should be done normally either before Mass or at the end of Mass.

These instructions will lead to conformity in posture and action of God's people throughout our Diocese. It is the serious responsibility of each pastor/administrator to see that they are followed in each parish, so that God's people may be nourished all the more through the liturgy.

I do want to thank all our priests for their faithfulness to the norms of the church in the liturgy. My prayers are with you as we begin this period of instruction. *Every priest is responsible to see that these norms are faithfully followed in his parish.*

In Christ, our Lord

Most Rev. John T. Steinbock  
Bishop, Diocese of Fresno

## General Instruction of the Roman Missal, First Sunday of Advent, 2008

### **Instruction #1 to God's people from Bishop John T. Steinbock, Diocese of Fresno.**

Beginning with this first Sunday of Advent 2008, each Sunday I *am repeating nine instructions I gave in Advent of 2003. These norms should already be in place throughout the Diocese.* I am repeating them as we have many new priests in our Diocese. *These norms come mainly from the "General Instruction of the Roman Missal," approved by Pope John Paul II.* There are very few changes from the way we have been celebrating the Sunday Eucharist in our Diocese for these many years. A one-page article, as this one, will be available with your Sunday bulletins explaining a different aspect from the General Instruction each Sunday. Each Sunday, the priest will be giving any needed explanations from the pulpit. These explanations will be especially helpful for all those involved in liturgical roles and in planning parish liturgies. I intend simply to highlight the more important aspects of this Instruction.

### **What is the General Instruction of the Roman Missal?**

The liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council have led us to celebrate Mass in our native language in order to help us grow in holiness by leading us to a more conscious, active, and fruitful participation in the Eucharist. The "General Instruction of the Roman Missal" is a guide for implementing the latest changes in the Liturgy, with the English translation confirmed by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. Pope John Paul II on Holy Thursday 2002 approved this third Latin edition of the General Instruction. The General Instruction sets norms and guidelines for such things as posture, physical actions of the priest and deacon, arrangement of furnishings and other matters of celebrating the Eucharist. As I mentioned, there will be very few changes from which we are now accustomed.

### **Chapter I: The importance and Dignity of the Eucharistic Celebration.**

The celebration of Mass, as the action of Christ and the People of God, is the center of our Christian lives. In the Mass "is found the high point both of the action by which God sanctifies the world in Christ and of the worship that the human race offers to the Father, adoring him through Christ, the Son of God, in the Holy Spirit. In it, moreover, during the course of the year, the mysteries of redemption are recalled so as in some way to be made present." The first chapter speaks of the diocesan Bishop as the chief steward of the mysteries of God and of being the moderator, promoter, and guardian of the liturgical life in his diocese. It also reminds priests that as servants of the sacred Liturgy, they are not permitted on their own initiative to add, to remove, or to change anything in the celebration of the Mass.

**Next Sunday, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent: posture of the people during Mass--sitting, kneeling, standing.**

## General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Second Sunday of Advent, 2008

**Instruction #2 to God's people from Bishop John T. Steinbock, Diocese of Fresno.**

### **Posture of the people of God during the Mass Chapter II, paragraphs 42 & 43.**

**#42.** “The gestures and posture of the priest, the deacon, and the ministers, as well as those of the people, ought to contribute to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity, so that the true and full meaning of the different parts of the celebration is evident and that the participation of all is fostered... A common posture, to be observed by all participants, is a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community gathered for the sacred Liturgy: it both expresses and fosters the intention and spiritual attitude of the participants.”

The posture as directed in the General Instruction will only affect a few of our parishes, as most of the parishes are already in accord with the norms. In a few parishes, I have found people standing after the Consecration and standing after the “Lamb of God.” After the “holy, holy, holy” everyone is to kneel until after the Great Amen, unless prevented by reasons of health, lack of space, or other good reason. After the “Lamb of God” the faithful are to kneel until coming forth for Communion. After Communion, as we normally do now, individuals may sit or kneel as they wish. (#43)

#### **The posture of the people at Mass in the Diocese of Fresno:**

From the beginning of Mass to the First Reading .....	Stand
From the First Reading until the Gospel acclamation .....	Sit
From the Gospel acclamation until the end of the Gospel.....	Stand
During the homily .....	Sit
From the Profession of Faith until General Intercessions.....	Stand
From the Preparation of the Gifts to “ <i>Pray Brethren...</i> ” .....	Sit
<i>From “Pray brethren...” through the “holy, holy, holy”</i> .....	Stand
From the end of the holy, holy, holy until after the Great Amen .....	Kneel
From the beginning of the Our Father until the completion of The Lamb of God .....	Stand
From the completion of the Lamb of God until the Distribution of Communion .....	Kneel
<i>Receiving Communion</i> .....	<i>Stand</i>
During the silence after the distribution of Communion .....	Sit or Kneel
From the beginning of the Prayer after Communion until The End of Mass.....	Stand

**Next Sunday, Third Sunday of Advent: Proper posture and veneration for Reception of Holy Communion.**

**General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Third Sunday of Advent, 2008  
Instruction #3 to God's people from Bishop John T. Steinbock, Diocese of Fresno.  
Proper Posture and Veneration for Reception of Holy Communion  
Chapter II, paragraph 42; Chapter IV, paragraphs 160 & 161**

**Standing is the norm for receiving Holy Communion**

**#160:** "The faithful are not permitted to take the consecrated bread or the sacred chalice by themselves, still less to hand them from one to another. The norm for reception of Holy Communion in the dioceses of the United States is standing. Communicants should not be denied Holy Communion because they kneel. Rather, such instances should be addressed pastorally, by providing the faithful with proper catechesis on the reasons for this norm."

Uniformity by all in receiving Communion standing serves as a "sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community for the sacred Liturgy" and it "both expresses and fosters the spiritual attitude of those assisting" (42). A lack of uniformity can serve as a sign of disunity or even a sense of individualism. Kneeling to receive Communion, besides interrupting the flow of people receiving Communion, draws attention to oneself rather than having an emphasis on the Lord Jesus in the Eucharist. Standing for us in our Christian tradition is a sign, not only of being one with the risen Lord, but a sign also of being sent forth by Christ in the Eucharist to bring Him and serve Him in the lives of those around us.

**Sign of Veneration before receiving Holy Communion**

**#160:** When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the Sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister. The consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant. When Holy Communion is received under both kinds, the sign of reverence is also made before receiving the Precious Blood."

The bow before receiving Communion should be done as the person in front is receiving the Eucharist. If the person receives Communion by hand, no one is to take the host from the priest. The person is to extend their hands outward in front of their bodies and upward, the left hand on top of the right hand, for the priest to place the host in the communicant's hand. The person should step aside, take the host by his or her right fingers from the left hand, to consume the host, and then go to receive from the cup, or return to one's place. After the priest says "The Body of Christ," the communicant replies, Amen, and receives the host and consumes it entirely immediately after stepping aside. (161) *No other response should be said, other than "Amen."*

*(Extraordinary ministers should approach the altar only after the priest has received Communion. The priest or deacon gives communion to the extraordinary ministers communion and then hands them the sacred vessels for distribution.)*

**Next Sunday, Fourth Sunday of Advent: Importance of Singing**

## General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Fourth Sunday of Advent, 2008

**Instruction #4 to God's people from Bishop John T. Steinbock, Diocese of Fresno.**

### **Importance of Singing Chapter II, paragraphs 39-41**

**#39:** "The Christian faithful who gather together as one to await the Lord's coming are instructed by the Apostle Paul to sing together psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Col 3:16). Singing is the sign of the heart's joy (Acts 2:46)..."

**#40:** "Great importance should, therefore, be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass, with due consideration for the culture of the people and abilities of each liturgical assembly. Although it is not always necessary (e.g., in weekday Masses) to sing all the texts that are of themselves meant to be sung, every care should be taken that singing by ministers and the people is not absent in celebrations that occur on Sundays and on holy days of obligation..."

**#41.** "All other things being equal, Gregorian chant holds pride of place because it is proper to the Roman Liturgy... Since faithful from different countries come together ever more frequently, it is fitting that they know how to sing together at least some parts of the Ordinary of the Mass in Latin..."

I first would like to commend, encourage and support all those who are involved in music ministry in our liturgical celebrations. Your ministry is an essential part of the celebration of the Eucharist. I give thanks to God for each and everyone of you.

I also give thanks to all those pastors who support a good music ministry in their parishes. We are blest by many good choirs throughout our diocese. I also want to encourage pastors, even in our smaller parishes with few personnel and financial resources, to put an emphasis on music ministry in the liturgy. This must be a priority for every pastor: to provide a liturgy that expresses the joy and prayerful spirit of God's people through song.

I encourage all music ministers to learn more of liturgical music if they have not had the opportunity to do this. There are scholarship funds available for parish music ministers for attending workshops on Liturgical music, and for classes for playing the organ or other musical instruments used for the liturgy. You can inquire about this through your pastor.

I encourage a balance between hymns sung by the choir and hymns in which all the faithful participate. Also every parish choir should learn to sing in Latin and teach the faithful the **Pater Noster**, (simple chant) the **Sanctus** and the **Agnus Dei** (Mass of the Angels), to be used at Mass with many different ethnic groups participating.

**Next Sunday, The Liturgy of the Word: Part one, The readings**

General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Feast of the Holy Family, 2008  
Instruction #5 to God's people from Bishop John T. Steinbock, Diocese of Fresno.

## **The Liturgy of the Word, Part One: The readings, Chapter II, paragraphs 55-64**

**#55:** "...in the readings, as explained by the homily, God speaks to his people, opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation, and offering them spiritual nourishment; and Christ himself is present in the midst of the faithful through his word."

**#56:** "The Liturgy of the Word is to be celebrated in such a way as to promote meditation, and so any sort of haste that hinders recollection must clearly be avoided." There may be short periods of silence before the first reading, after the first and second readings, and also at the conclusion of the homily. **#58:** "...It is unlawful to substitute other non-biblical texts for the readings and responsorial Psalm, which contain the word of God."

**#59:** "By tradition, the function of proclaiming the readings is ministerial, not presidential. The readings, therefore, should be proclaimed by a lector, and the Gospel by a deacon, or, in his absence, a priest other than the celebrant."

**#60:** "The reading of the Gospel is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word." Reverence is shown to the words of the Gospel, by the faithful standing to listen to it, and the marks of reverence given to the *Book of the Gospels*.

**#61 The Responsorial Psalm** fosters meditation on the word of God. "It is preferable that this psalm be sung, at least as far as the people's response is concerned." "Songs or hymns may not be used in place of the responsorial psalm." Psalms, proper to the reading, in musical settings may be used. *The psalm should be proclaimed at the ambo.*

**#62 Acclamation before the Gospel** The *Alleluia* is sung by all while standing, in order to welcome and greet the Lord who is about to speak in the Gospel. "The verse...is sung either by the choir or by the cantor." "The *Alleluia* is sung in every season other than Lent." During Lent, the verse in the Lectionary may be sung, without the *Alleluia*.

**#63:** "The alleluia or verse before the Gospel may be omitted if they are not sung." ..

I want to emphasize to all our pastors that all lectors must be trained to proclaim the Word of God. They must learn to reflect on the Word they are to proclaim, be able to enunciate well, proclaim the Word reverently rather than simply reading the Word, have proper eye contact with the people, and be aware of the proper use of the microphone. *This is a grave responsibility for each pastor. Children should not be lectors for 1<sup>st</sup> communion or Confirmation unless they are regular lectors in the Sunday liturgy.* Thank you to all our trained lectors in our many parishes.

**Next Sunday, The Liturgy of the Word, Part two, The Homily, Profession of Faith and the Prayer of the faithful**

General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Feast of the Epiphany, 2009  
Instruction #6 to God's people from Bishop John T. Steinbock, Diocese of Fresno.

## **The Liturgy of the Word, Part Two: The Homily, the Profession of Faith and the Prayers of the Faithful, Chapter II, paragraphs 65-71**

### **The Homily**

**#65:** "The homily is part of the Liturgy and is strongly recommended, for it is necessary for the nurturing of the Christian life. It should be an exposition of some aspect of the readings from Sacred Scripture or of another text from the ordinary or from the Proper of the Mass of the day and should take into account both the mystery being celebrated and the particular needs of the listeners."

**#66:** "The homily should ordinarily be given by the priest celebrant himself. He may entrust it to a concelebrating priest or occasionally, according to circumstances, to the deacon, but never to a lay person." "There is to be a homily on Sundays and holy days of obligation at all Masses that are celebrated with the participation of a congregation." "It is recommended on other days, especially on the weekdays of Advent, Lent, and the Easter Season, as well as on other festive days... After the homily, a brief period of silence is appropriately observed."

I encourage all priests to spend sufficient time in prayer and reflection on the Sacred Readings in order to prepare a homily that truly will speak to the needs and experiences of God's people entrusted to their care. This is one of the first priorities of every priest—to preach the Word of God. Thank you to all our priests who Sunday after Sunday, day after day, nourish God's people through their prayer and study of God's Word.

### **The Profession of Faith**

**#67.** The purpose of the Creed is that the gathered people may respond to the Word of God and that they call to mind and confess the great mysteries of the faith before these mysteries are celebrated in the Eucharist. **#68:** "The Creed is to be sung or said by the priest together with the people on Sundays and solemnities." It may be sung, or "recited by all, together, or by two parts of the assembly responding one to the other."

### **The Prayer of the Faithful**

**#69.** In the Prayer of the Faithful, the people, "exercising the office of their baptismal priesthood, offer prayers to God for the salvation of all." **#70:** "As a rule, the series of intentions is to be: a) For the needs of the Church; b) for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world; c) for those burdened by any kind of difficulty; d) for the local community." In particular celebrations, the intentions may reflect more closely the particular occasion, e.g., marriage, confirmation. **#71:** The priest directs this prayer from the chair. The intentions, which should be succinct, are announced by the deacon, *a cantor, or a lector, These petitions should not be read from the ambo.*

**Next Sunday: The role of the deacon at Mass**

General Instruction of the Roman Missal, **Baptism of the Lord, 2009**  
Instruction #7 to God's people from Bishop John T. Steinbock, Diocese of Fresno.

**The Role of the Deacon at Mass, Chapter IV, paragraphs 171-186**

We are now blest with *many* Permanent Deacons in our Diocese and so Deacons are taking on a more visible role in the Liturgy. The vision for our Permanent Deacons is that through the unity of their threefold ministry of Service, Word and Sacrament, the Deacon becomes a sign for all in the Christian community to realize they are all called to a life of service through being nourished by Word and Sacrament. I give thanks to the many deacons exercising their ministry in so many varied roles of service in our diocese.

**The introductory rites**

**#172** For the entrance procession, the deacon carries the Book of the Gospels slightly elevated preceding the priest, or else walks at the priest's *right* side. **#173** He omits the sign of reverence and places the Book of the Gospels on the altar, after which, together with the priest, he venerates the altar with a kiss. If he does not carry the Book of the Gospels, he makes a profound bow to the altar and with the priest venerates the altar.

**The Liturgy of the Word**

**#175-177** The deacon assists the priest if incense is used. He makes a profound bow before the priest and asks for a blessing. He then goes to the altar, bows and takes up the Book of the Gospels, proceeding to the ambo, carrying the book slightly elevated. If the Bishop is present, after the Gospel, he carries the book to him to be kissed. The deacon is the one normally to announce the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful.

**The Liturgy of the Eucharist**

**#178-180** The deacon prepares the altar and assists the priest in receiving the people's gifts. (*All chalices to be used should be filled with wine and set on the altar at the Offertory.*) He hands the priest the paten with bread to be consecrated, pours wine and a little water into the chalice and presents the chalice to the priest. If incense is used, the deacon assists the priest and then incenses the priest and people. In our Diocese the deacon is to stand during Eucharistic Prayer near, but slightly behind, the priest. At the final Doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer, the deacon holds the chalice elevated while the priest elevates the paten with host, until the people have responded *Amen*. **#181-183** After the priest conveys the words of peace to the people, the deacon invites all to exchange the Sign of Peace. "After the priest's Communion, the deacon receives Communion under both kinds from the priest himself and then assists the priest in distributing Communion." If Communion is given under both kinds, the deacon administers the chalice. The deacon *purifies the chalices and other sacred vessels*.

**The Concluding Rites**

**#184-186** For a Solemn Blessing, *the deacon, after the "Lord be with you,"* tells the people to bow their heads. After the blessing the deacon dismisses the people, venerates the altar with the priest and departs in the manner similar to the procession beforehand.

**Next Sunday: Distribution of Communion under both kinds**

## General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 2nd Sunday Ordinary Time 2009

Instruction #8 to God's people from Bishop John T. Steinbock, Diocese of Fresno.

### Distribution of Communion under Both Kinds, Chapter IV, paragraphs 281-284

**#281** "Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it is distributed under both kinds." **#282** Our faith teaches that Christ, whole and entire, is received even under only one species. **#283** "The Bishop has the faculty to permit Communion under both kinds whenever it may seem appropriate to the priest to whom, as its own shepherd, a community has been entrusted, provided that the faithful have been well instructed and there is no danger of profanation of the Sacrament or of the Rite becoming difficult because of the large number of participants or some other reason." *The Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America* are to be followed.

These Norms were approved by the Conference of Catholic Bishops on June 14, 2001, and approved by *The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments* on March 22, 2002. The rest of this article will deal with these Norms.

2. It is by taking and sharing the Eucharistic bread and chalice—"signs perceptible to the senses"—that we obey the Lord's command and grow in the likeness of the Lord whose Body and Blood they both signify and contain." 4. "The Eucharist is a sacred meal, a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity in which Christ calls us as friends... The Eucharist perpetuates the sacrifice of Christ, offered once and for all for us and for our salvation, making present the victory and triumph of Christ's death and resurrection. It is strength for those who journey in hope through this life and who desire to dwell with God in the life to come."

**26. Ordinary ministers of Holy Communion** are the Bishop, priests and deacons.

**28. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.** When there are not sufficient ordinary ministers of Holy Communion present, the priest may call upon extraordinary ministers to assist him. They "should receive sufficient spiritual, theological and practical preparation to fulfill their role with knowledge and reverence." *If ordinary ministers are present, the extraordinary ministers should not distribute Communion.* **29.** "All ministers of Holy Communion should show the greatest reverence for the Most Holy Eucharist by their demeanor, their attire, and the manner in which they handle the consecrated bread or wine."

**37.** Empty ciboria are brought to the altar after the breaking of the bread. The deacon or priest fills the ciboria. *Chalices with the Precious Blood should already be on the altar.*

**38.** The priest or deacon distributes Communion to the extraordinary ministers and hands them the sacred vessels for distribution of Communion to the people. **52.** *The priest or deacon is to purify the sacred vessels. (An extraordinary minister may dry the ciboria and cups after they have been purified.)*

*(It is not spoken about in the Instruction, but many people and children who are not able to receive Communion, come forward for a blessing. The priest or minister may give a blessing to these people)*

**Next Sunday: The Lord's Prayer and the Sign of Peace**

## General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 3rd Sunday Ordinary Time 2009

**Instruction #9 to God's people from Bishop John T. Steinbock, Diocese of Fresno.**

### **The Lord's Prayer, Chapter II, paragraph 81 & 152**

**#81:** "In the Lord's Prayer a petition is made for daily food, which for Christians means preeminently the Eucharistic bread, and also for purification from sin, so that what is holy may, in fact, be given to those who are holy. The priest says the invitation to the prayer, and all the faithful say it with him." The Prayer and doxology may be sung or said aloud.

Nothing is said specifically about the holding of hands during the Our Father, which in many of our parishes has become a custom. As the Bishop, I certainly will allow this custom to continue, but with a few caveats. The priest is to have his hands extended during the Lord's Prayer (**#152**). The priest and any ministers at the altar are not to hold hands during the Our Father. Even where the custom is prevalent, people have the choice not to hold hands if they do not wish, as this sign is not demanded by liturgical norms. Ushers should not go to the middle aisles to get the people to hold hands across the pews.

### **The Sign of Peace, Chapter II, paragraph 82 & 154**

**#82:** In the Rite of Peace "the Church asks for peace and unity for herself and for the whole human family, and the faithful express to each other their ecclesial communion and mutual charity before communicating in the Sacrament." "As for the sign of peace to be given, the manner is to be established by Conferences of Bishops in accordance with the culture and customs of the peoples. It is, however, appropriate that each person offer the sign of peace only to those who are nearest and in a sober manner."

**#154:** "The priest may give the sign of peace to the ministers but always remains within the sanctuary, so as not to disturb the celebration. In the dioceses of the United States of America, for a good reason, on special occasions (for example, in the case of a funeral, a wedding, or when civic leaders are present) the priest may offer the sign of peace to a few of the faithful nearer the sanctuary. ... All offer one another a sign that expresses peace, communion and charity. While the sign of peace is being given, one may say, *The peace of the Lord be with you always*, to which the response is *Amen*."

At the sign of peace we turn to those who are near to us and greet them either with an embrace or with a handshake, whatever may be more appropriate in local custom and to a particular ethnic group. This is not a time for socializing; it is a time for a simple gesture of respect and love. At the normal Sunday celebration, people should not leave their pews, or the ministers the sanctuary, to greet one another. What is important is that the gesture is an authentic sign of our love of one another.

**This is my final article regarding the norms on the Liturgy. Bishop John**