IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

"Allocutiones: Promessa di osservare la Legge di Dio (2-5); Inno di vittoria per il passaggio del Mar Rosso (6-8); Salmo 116 invito a lodare Dio per il suo amore (9-11); Salmo 117 Canto digiòia e di vittoria (12-14)"

CONGREGATIO DE CULTU DIVINO ET DISCIPLINA SACRAMENTORUM

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CONGREGATIO DE CULTU DIVINO
ET DISCIPLINA SACRAMENTORUM

LITTERAE CONGREGATIONIS

Nuper notitiae pervenerunt ad Congregationem de Cultu Divino et
Disciplina Sacramentorum de sacerdote, qui sacram Communionem in
Missae celebratione fidelis laico negare dicebat, ob eiusdem laici
desiderium genibus flexis communicandi. Inde Dicasterium id oppor-
tunum duxit litteras Episcopo illius dioecesis necnon Oratori exhibere,
quae ob peculiare momentum etiam publici iuris fiunt.

Prot. n. 1322/02/L

Rome, 1 July 2002

Your Excellency,

This Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of
the Sacraments has recently received reports of members of the
faithful in your Diocese being refused Holy Communion unless
while standing to receive, as opposed to kneeling. The reports
state that such a policy has been announced to parishioners. There
were possible indications that such a phenomenon might be some-
what more widespread in the Diocese, but the Congregation is un-
able to verify whether such is the case. This Dicastery is confident
that Your Excellency will be in a position to make a more reliable
determination of the matter, and these complaints in any event
provide an occasion for the Congregation to communicate the
manner in which it habitually addresses this matter, with a request
that you make this position known to any priests who may be in
need of being thus informed.

The Congregation in fact is concerned at the number of simi-
lar complaints that it has received in recent months from various
places, and considers any refusal of Holy Communion to a mem-
er of the faithful on the basis of his or her kneeling posture to be
a grave violation of one of the most basic rights of the Christian
faithful, namely that of being assisted by their Pastors by means of
the Sacraments (Codex Iuris Canonici, canon 213). In view of the
law that “sacred ministers may not deny the sacraments to those
who opportune ask for them, are properly disposed and are not
prohibited by law from receiving them” (canon 843 § 1), there
should be no such refusal to any Catholic who presents himself for
Holy Communion at Mass, except in cases presenting a danger of
grave scandal to other believers arising out of the person’s unre-
pentent public sin or obstinate heresy or schism, publicly professed
or declared. Even where the Congregation has approved of legisla-
tion denoting standing as the posture for Holy Communion, in
accordance with the adaptations permitted to the Conferences of
Bishops by the Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani n. 160, para-
graph 2, it has done so with the stipulation that communicants
who choose to kneel are not to be denied Holy Communion on
these grounds.

In fact, as His Eminence, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger has recently
emphasized, the practice of kneeling for Holy Communion has in its
favor a centuries-old tradition, and it is a particularly expressive sign
of adoration, completely appropriate in light of the true, real and
substantial presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ under the consecrated
species.

Given the importance of this matter, the Congregation would re-
quest that Your Excellency inquire specifically whether this priest in
fact has a regular practice of refusing Holy Communion to any mem-
er of the faithful in the circumstances described above and — if the
complaint is verified — that you also firmly instruct him and any
other priests who may have such a practice to refrain from acting thus
in the future. Priests should understand that the Congregation will
regard future complaints of this nature with great seriousness, and if
they are verified, it intends to seek disciplinary action consonant with
the gravity of the pastoral abuse.

Thanking Your Excellency for your attention to this matter and
relying on your kind collaboration in its regard,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Jorge A. Card. Medina Estevez
Prefect

† Francesco Pio Tamburrino
Archbishop Secretary

* * *

Prot. n. 1322/02/L
Rome, 1 July 2002

Dear Sir,

This Congregation for Divine Worship gratefully acknowledges
receipt of your letter, regarding an announced policy of denial of
Holy Communion to those who kneel to receive it at a certain
church.

It is troubling that you seem to express some reservations about
both the propriety and the usefulness of addressing the Holy See
regarding this matter. Canon 212 §2 of the Code of Canon Law states
that “Christ’s faithful are totally free to make known their needs, es-
specially their spiritual ones, and their desire: to the Pastor of the
Church”. The canon then continues in §3: “According to their own
knowledge competence and position, they have the right, and indeed
sometimes the duty, to present to the sacred Pastor; their opinions re-
garding those things that pertain to the good of the Church. ...” Ac-
cordingly, in consideration of the nature of the problem and the rela-
tive likelihood that it might or might not be resolved on the local
level, every member of the faithful has the right of recourse to the
Roman Pontiff either personally or by means of the Dicasteries or
Tribunals of the Roman Curia.

Another fundamental right of the faithful, as noted in canon 213,
is “the right to receive assistance by the sacred Pastors from the spiri-
tual goods of the Church, especially the word of God and the Sacra-
ments”. In view of the law that “sacred ministers may not deny the
sacraments to those who opportune ask for them, are properly dis-
posed and are not prohibited by law from receiving them” (canon
843 § 1), there should be no such refusal to any Catholic who
presents himself for Holy Communion at Mass, except in cases pre-
senting a danger of grave scandal to other believers arising out of the
person’s unrepented public sin or obstinate heresy or schism, publicly
professed or declared. Even where the Congregation has approved of
legislation denoting standing as the posture for Holy Communion, in
accordance with the adaptations permitted to the Conferences of
Bishops by the Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani n. 160, paragraph
2, it has done so with the stipulation that communicants who choose
to kneel are not to be denied Holy Communion on these grounds.

Please be assured that the Congregation takes this matter very se-
riously, and is making the necessary contacts in its regard. At the
same time, this Dicastery continues to be ready to be of assistance if
you should need to contact it again in the future.

Thanking you for your interest, and with every prayerful good
wish, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Mons. Mario Marini
Undersecretary