

Celebrating Reconciliation and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament at the same time

Last year during “all-day confessions” some parishes exposed the Blessed Sacrament for the entire day while penitents came to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. When a decision such as this is made, it is good to step back and reflect on how it unfolded and what the benefits were.

No pastoral directive was given to expose the Blessed Sacrament. This was a decision taken by the individual parish. Some pastors reported that the exposed Blessed Sacrament created a warm welcoming environment. Others that it caught the penitents by surprise having not prayed before the Blessed Sacrament in recent years. They did however appreciate the eucharistic presence of the Risen Lord as a tangible experience of Christ’s forgiving love.

This memo is written not to invite exposition of the Blessed Sacrament on this day of Confessions, but to address “best practices”.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation as Encounter with Divine Presence

We offer the day-long opportunity for Confession to extend God’s merciful love to all who approach the sacrament. In that sacramental encounter the penitent is welcomed, listens to the words of scripture, enters into an honest dialogue of one’s relationship with God and neighbour, acknowledges one’s rupture of that relationship, accepts a form of penance, receives absolution, praises God and goes forth in peace. This ritual itself is an intimate encounter with God.

The sacramental rite is a dynamic engagement between God, mediated through the presbyter and the penitent. It is in the doing - the action of listening to God’s Word, confessing one’s sinfulness, praising God in gratitude and going forth to knit up broken relationships with our neighbour, that the penitent is transformed. The Holy Spirit strengthens and grants courage, as the Father lovingly forgives and Christ makes available this reconciling act.

The sacramental encounter in itself reunites us with God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the Divine Presence of the Holy Trinity.

Eucharistic Presence In The Monstrance

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament provides a concrete experience of Divine Presence – the Risen Lord given to us by the celebration of the eucharistic liturgy. This wondrous sacrament is made present to us through Word proclaimed and broken open, and through prayer that the Holy Spirit transform bread and wine into the Body and Blood of the Risen Lord. Christ’s sacrifice of obedience to the Father teaches us the cost of such transformation.

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament allows us to extend our Communion silence. It rejoins us to that moment at Mass when the communion hymn is over and we quietly ponder the mystery of

being one in Christ. In our prayer before the exposed Sacrament we ponder once again that great mystery and cry out for reconciliation of all that God has created.

The Blessed Sacrament is exposed so that the faithful may gather in groups or at least in twos for adoration and prayer. Certain requirements are expected. The host used for exposition should be consecrated at the most recent Mass. No more candles than used at Mass should adorn the monstrance. Prayers, readings, and singing should be scheduled throughout the period of exposition. If Exposition is to occur, a parish needs to plan how these requirements will be met.

Creating a Welcoming Environment

If the parish exposes the Blessed Sacrament primarily for the sake of creating a welcoming environment, there are other alternate decisions that could be made. In the Lenten season a display of cross, wheat and grapes might lead a penitent into reflection prior to celebrating the Sacrament; or posters of people in need, our broken world, war, violence – all the evils that weigh on our hearts. Soft music and lighting will create a warm ambiance. A person from the pastoral staff greeting penitents as they enter the church will be a visible sign of welcome on behalf of the parish and the universal Church. These alternatives could provide the warm and hospitable environment that is sought.

Best Practices

If a parish chooses to expose the Sacrament on this day:

- Consecrate the host for the monstrance at the morning liturgy
- Follow the rite: immediately after communion the host is placed in the monstrance; after a brief period of silent prayer the celebrant prays the Prayer after Communion; the sacrament is incensed, a collect about the sacrament is offered; then the ministers leave the sanctuary in silence. The faithful continue in prayer.
- Throughout the day appropriate prayer services are offered: Liturgy of the Word, Evening Prayer, or a service as found in *Order for the Solemn Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament*. The requirement for such services indicates that Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is integrally connected with the public proclamation of the Word and the offering of Intercession.
- In such Prayer Services the work of public intercession for the reconciliation of the world becomes apparent.

Summary Note

The Sacrament of Reconciliation does not require Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for a period of time does require appropriate communal Prayer.