

The Quality of Symbols

A noble simplicity should be ensured

Materials and objects used in the Eucharist are to be “truly worthy and beautiful,” authentic in their noble simplicity, and well adapted to sacred use. The greatest care and sensitivity are necessary, even in the smallest matters, to achieve “a noble simplicity and elegance.”

Bread and Wine

The very nature of sacramental symbolism demands that the elements for the Eucharist be recognisable, in themselves and without explanation, as food and drink.

- Bread must be recently baked, made only from wheat flour, and should have the appearance of food. In colour, taste, texture, and smell it should be identifiable as bread by those who are to share it....
- Wine should be natural and pure, from the fruit of the grape, and free from any foreign substance. To be seen and recognised for what it is and what it signifies, it can help greatly if the wine is brought to the altar in clear glass containers and is of a sufficiently rich colour to be clearly distinguishable from water.
- Care should be taken to ensure that the bread and the wine for the Eucharist are kept fresh; that the wine does not sour or the bread spoil or become too hard to be broken easily.

Candles

Candles are used at every liturgical service as a sign of dignity and of the festiveness of the celebration. The light of the candles signifies Christ, light of the world; the gradual burning down of the candle as the wax is consumed in the flame serves as sign of Christ’s self-sacrifice in the service of his mission.

- In order that the symbolism of the candle be an authentic one, only genuine wax candles should be used in the liturgy. The use of fake ‘candles’ with wax or oil inserts, is not permitted at Mass.

GIRM 325, CTM 114, 106–107

Some Questions

- In what ways does the quality of symbols used contribute to the richness of celebration?
- Are there aspects of parish celebration where authenticity of symbol has been sacrificed for sake of convenience?

Practical Points

- Make the most of opportunities for preaching about the way that symbols reveal aspects of faith. (Guidance is provided in the Introduction to *In Communion With Christ*, downloadable from website below)
- Ensure that those who are responsible for provisioning and cleaning the church know how much their work matters to the parish and enhances the liturgy

Further References

General Instruction of the Roman Missal:
307, 319–351

Celebrating the Mass: 52–3, 106–125

Redemptionis Sacramentum: 48–50

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Questions for Groups

1. What is good about current practice?
What concerns do you have?

4. Who is most directly involved in these matters, e.g. liturgical ministers?
What formation/information is necessary to engage them in the renewal of current practice?

2. In what ways does the documentation affirm or challenge your current practice?

5. How will the assembly be engaged in the process?
What, in particular, needs addressing at Sunday and/or weekday celebrations?

3. Prioritise the issues you have identified.

6. How will you know whether the formation has worked?