

Deacon's Duties and Gestures

ROME, MAY 16, 2006 (Zenit.org).- Answered by Father Edward McNamara, professor of liturgy at the Regina Apostolorum university.

Q: I train deacons in the pastoral administration of the sacraments and laity in participating in the liturgy. Recently a deacon had some queries for me: a) Does the deacon also raise the chalice or paten together with the celebrant at the doxology at the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer? b) After the celebrant gives the blessing at the end of the Eucharist, when the deacon is sending forth the people, "Go you are sent forth ...," does he pronounce the words by spreading out his hands like the priest does at the "Lord be with you"? Or does he pronounce the words with joined hands? c) Is a deacon allowed to give the blessing with the Eucharist at the Benediction? -- F.P., Kolkata, India

A: The first question is clearly answered by the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), No. 180:

"At the final doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer, the deacon stands next to the priest, holding the chalice elevated while the priest elevates the paten with the host, until the people have responded with the acclamation, Amen."

Note that the deacon holds up the chalice in silence and does not join in singing or saying the doxology.

Regarding the second query, the GIRM, in Nos. 184-185, on the concluding rites specifically states that the deacon dismisses the people with hands joined:

"184. Once the prayer after Communion has been said, the deacon makes brief announcements to the people, if indeed any need to be made, unless the priest prefers to do this himself.

"185. If a prayer over the people or a solemn formula for the blessing is used, the deacon says, 'Inclinate vos ad benedictionem' (Bow your heads and pray for God's blessing). After the priest's blessing, the deacon, with hands joined and facing the people, dismisses them, saying, 'Ite, missa est' (The Mass is ended, go in peace)."

The deacon also keeps his hands joined for the greeting "The Lord be with you" before reading the Gospel, and while saying "Let us offer each other the sign of peace."

The basic reasons for this is that the gesture of opening and closing the hands while greeting the assembly in Mass is considered as a presidential act and is thus reserved to the celebrant.

Also, the invitation to the sign of peace and the dismissal are not greetings but monitions to the assembly.

The "Lord be with you" before the Gospel is a special case as it is a greeting but, perhaps because reading of the Gospel has not traditionally been a presidential act in the Latin rite, the greeting is said with hands closed.

Note that even when a priest celebrates without a deacon he does not open his hands at the aforesaid moments.

All the same, whenever a deacon presides over an assembly -- for example, for the Divine Office or for a Communion service -- he greets the assembly by opening and closing his hands in the same manner as a priest.

With respect to the deacon's imparting Eucharistic Benediction: A deacon is an ordinary minister of the Eucharist and as such, in the absence of the priest, may perform practically all of the rites foreseen in the ritual for worship of the Eucharist outside of Mass.

Thus he may give Benediction providing no priest is present or available. In doing so he wears the same vestments as the priest (cope and humeral veil along with alb/surplice and deacon's stole).

If a priest is available, the deacon assists the priest in the manner described in the books: exposing and reposing the Blessed Sacrament, offering him the monstrance for the blessing, and replacing it upon the altar afterward.

The unavailability of the priest need not mean total absence but a reasonable impediment. If, for example, a deacon is leading Eucharistic devotions while a priest attends many penitents in confession, then the deacon could impart Benediction.

* * *