

Revised General Instruction and Reservation of the Blessed Sacrament

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A development of the very greatest importance for Catholic fighting to prevent the destruction of beautiful sanctuaries in churches built through the sacrifices of their fathers. A considerably revised edition of the General Instruction for the Roman Missal (GIRM) was published in 2000. Article 276 of the 1970 GIRM recommended that the Blessed Sacrament be reserved in a chapel suited to private adoration and prayer, but also stated specifically that the structure of the church or legitimate local custom (*juxta legitimas locorum consuetudines*) can provide reasons for not doing this. Article 276 has been removed from the GIRM of 2000, which no longer contains a recommendation that the Blessed Sacrament should be reserved in a separate chapel. Reservation of the Blessed Sacrament is dealt with in Articles 314 and 315 of the 2000 GIRM, which read:

314 In accordance with the structure of each church and legitimate local customs, the Most Blessed Sacrament should be reserved in a tabernacle in a part of the church, which is noble, worthy, conspicuous, well decorated and suitable for prayer. As a rule, there should be only one tabernacle, immovable, made of solid and unbreakable material and not transparent, and locked so that the danger of desecration is avoided as much as possible. Moreover, it is suitable that the tabernacle be blessed, before it is considered for liturgical use, according to the rite described in the Roman Ritual.

315 It is more in keeping with its meaning as a sign, that the tabernacle in which the Most Blessed Sacrament is reserved not be on the altar on which Mass is celebrated. Moreover, the tabernacle should be placed, according to the judgment of the diocesan Bishop:

- a) either in the sanctuary, apart from the altar of celebration, in the most suitable form and place, not excluding on an old altar which is no longer used for celebration;
- b) or even in another chapel suitable for adoration and the private prayer of the faithful, and which is integrally connected with the church and is conspicuous to the faithful.

Thus the position of the 1970 GIRM has been reversed. The former Article 276 had recommended a separate Blessed Sacrament Chapel as the norm and stated that only if this was not possible (*si hoc fieri non potest*) for the reasons given above should the tabernacle be placed on an altar or other location within the main body of the church. Now the sanctuary is to be the norm and a separate chapel the exception. Article 315 certainly does not prohibit the celebration of Mass on an altar where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. It simply expresses the opinion that this is "more in keeping with its meaning as a sign", an opinion with which we have every right to disagree in view of the address of Pope Pius XII to the liturgical congress in Assisi in 1956. This great Pope warned that the true motivation of those who objected to the celebration of Mass at an altar on which the Blessed Sacrament was reserved was to *lessen esteem* **"for the presence and action of Christ in the tabernacle."** Pope Pius insisted, correctly, **"To separate tabernacle from altar is to separate two things which by their origin and nature should remain united."** *If this was true in 1956, it is still true today.*