



**Office of Sacred Liturgy
Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama**

PROCEDURES AND CARE FOR THE HOLY OILS

The annual celebration of the Chrism Mass provides the opportunity to restate some of the important norms that pertain to the Holy Oils to heighten our corporate reverence toward them. During the Chrism Mass, the Bishop consecrates the chrism and blesses the other oils. The distribution of the new oils takes place in the Cathedral Life Center with the assistance of several deacons and members of the lay faithful.

The Holy Oils

The Church requires the use of proper oils for the celebration of the Sacraments. In the case of Confirmation, the use of the proper oil, the Sacred Chrism, involves the validity of the Sacrament. Only oils pressed from olive plants or from other plants that have been recently consecrated or blessed by the Bishop may be used in the administration of the Sacraments (Canon 847§1). Old oil can only be used when there is a true necessity (Canon 847§1). The Holy Oils can never be diluted under any circumstances with additional oil, even in order to fill an oil stock or container or to display the oils in an ambry or a repository. Perfumes or other substances can never be added to the consecrated and blessed oils. Also, the Holy Oils may never be employed for non-sacramental use.

The care of the Holy Oils is the responsibility of the pastor or priest chaplain. The pastor obtains the new oils from his own Bishop and keeps them carefully in a fitting place (Canon 847§2). The Bishop is instructed, in the directions for the celebration of the Chrism Mass, to advise the priests of the manner in which the Holy Oils are to be treated and honored, and carefully reserved (*Order of Blessing the Oil of Catechumens and of the Sick and of Consecrating Chrism*, 28).

Disposing of Old Oils

Each year in anticipation of the Chrism Mass, the pastor should see that all the old oils are collected from the ambry or repository, including all vessels with oil for the sick, and disposed of by burning them (*Book of Blessings*, 1127), or burying them. It is not fitting that the Holy Oils be burned along with trash or other household items. It is a custom in some places to burn all the old oils and the oil-saturated cottons in the new fire of the Easter Vigil.

Procedures for Receiving the New Oils at Chrism Mass

Note: There are adapted procedures for 2020 in view of the Corona Virus. What is published here will be slightly different than the procedures in 2020.

At the conclusion of the Mass, deacons and members of the lay faithful will fill three separate vessels with the three respective oils. Each parish will then collect their three labeled bottles from the Cathedral Life Center after the Chrism Mass. Please transfer them to your permanent vessels once your return to your parish. **Note: It is longer necessary to bring your own vessels to the Cathedral to be filled.**

Each parish will be receiving three bottles similar to the following:



Vessels for the Holy Oils

Only vessels specifically designated for the Holy Oils—the traditional oil stocks or other containers designed solely for the Holy Oils—are to be used on a permanent basis. These permanent vessels should be worthy of their liturgical function and be closed in such a way as to prevent the oils from being spilled and to ensure they remain fresh (*Book of Blessings*, 1126). Each vessel is to be clearly identified for its content. Once the oils have been received from the Cathedral on the day of Chrism Mass, they should be transferred immediately to the suitable permanent vessels.

Only the amount of new oils typically needed for the year for the administration of the Sacraments will be provided. Holy Oils should not be requested simply for their display. If during the year, additional Holy Oils are needed for sacramental use, please contact the Office of Sacred Liturgy.

Presentation of the Oils in the Parish

The reception of the Holy Oils may take place in individual parishes either before the celebration of the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper or at another time that seems more appropriate."

— *Roman Missal*, Chrism Mass, no. 15

The above rubric, included in the *Roman Missal, Third Edition*, does not specify how a "reception of the Holy Oils" would take place. The Church, therefore, permits pastors some latitude in determining the best way for it to be carried out in their parishes, should they wish to do so. A simple ceremony that is sober yet joyful, consistent with the Roman liturgy, and emphasizing the grace of the sacraments and unity with the bishop, would seem to be the most appropriate way to receive the oils in a parish.

One possible model is found in the *Order for the Reception of the Holy Oils*, which was confirmed by the Holy See for optional use in the dioceses of the United States in 1989.

Introduction

1. It is appropriate that the Oil of the Sick, the Oil of Catechumens, and the holy Chrism which are blessed by the Bishop during the Chrism Mass be presented to and received by the local parish community.
2. The presentation of the holy Oils may take place at the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday or, if the Oils are not blessed on Holy Thursday, on another day
3. The oils should be reserved in a suitable repository in the presbyterium or near the baptismal font.

Reception of the Holy Oils

1. The Oils, in suitable vessels, are carried in the Entrance Procession by ministers or other persons. The vessels of oil are placed on a table which has been prepared for them in the sanctuary. The Priest may incense the Oils after he has incensed the altar.
2. After the Greeting of the Mass the Priest may briefly explain the significance of the blessing of the Oils and their use. The Oils are then placed in the repository where they are to be reserved and the Mass continues in the usual manner.
3. The following, or other words, may be used to explain the significance of the Oils:

Oil of the Sick

This Oil of the Sick has been blessed by our Bishop for the healing of body, mind, and soul. May the sick, who are anointed with it, experience the compassion of Christ and his saving love.

Oil of Catechumens

This Oil of Catechumens has been blessed by our Bishop for the anointing of those preparing for Baptism. Through this anointing they are strengthened by Christ to resist the power of Satan and reject evil in all its forms, as they prepare for the saving waters of Baptism.

Holy Chrism

This holy Chrism, a mixture of olive oil and perfume, has been consecrated by our Bishop and the Priests of our Diocese. It will be used to anoint infants after Baptism, those who are to be confirmed, Bishops and Priests at their Ordination, and altars and churches at the time of their dedication.

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Reservation of the Holy Oils

The Holy Oils, according to ancient tradition, are reverently reserved in a special place in the church. Typically, this place is in the sanctuary; however, reservation may also be in the baptistry (*Built of Living Stones*, 117). An ambry or repository must be secured and locked (*Book of Blessings*, 1125). The vessels reserved in the ambry or repository must contain only the consecrated and blessed oils. Once again, Holy Oils in these vessels can never be diluted for the sake of display.