



Chrism Mass and Care of the Holy Oils

Reminders from the Office of Divine Worship

Archdiocese of Boston

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 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 cotton in the new fire of the Easter Vigil. Containers and vessels for oils should be emptied out and soaked in hot water and soap, and the water should be discarded by pouring it into the *sacrarium* or directly into the earth.

Vessels for the Holy Oils

As in the past, Holy Oils will be distributed in glass bottles for distribution to parishes, hospitals and other Catholic institutions where the sacramental presence of a Priest requires the oils. 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. Those parishes or hospitals that require oils in addition to the amount regularly distributed are kindly asked to bring their own containers; a limited amount of additional oil will be available. The glass bottles containing the oils given to the parishes after the Chrism Mass are not for display purposes or liturgical use. The glass containers are used to transport the oils or for non-public storage. When being used in the liturgy the oils should be in proper vessels. If, during the year, additional Holy Oils are needed for sacramental use, please contact the Office of Divine Worship at 617-746-5759 or email tlyman@rcab.org

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 baptistery (*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.