

Sacramental Wine – Definition (Catholic)

The principles involved in the determination of proper matter are relatively simple. The most recent official declaration on this point stems from the instruction "**Redemptionis Sacramentum**," No. 50, which basically sums up earlier laws and the Code of Canon Law, No. 924:

"The wine that is used in the most sacred celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice must be natural, from the fruit of the grape, pure and incorrupt, not mixed with other substances. During the celebration itself, a small quantity of water is to be mixed with it. Great care should be taken so that the wine intended for the celebration of the Eucharist is well conserved and has not soured. It is altogether forbidden to use wine of doubtful authenticity or provenance, for the Church requires certainty regarding the conditions necessary for the validity of the sacraments. Nor are other drinks of any kind to be admitted for any reason, as they do not constitute valid matter."

Almost a century earlier the **Catholic Encyclopedia** gave basically the same doctrine but added more details, all of which are still relevant.

"Wine is one of the two elements absolutely necessary for the sacrifice of the Eucharist. For valid and licit consecration vinum de vite, i.e. the pure juice of the grape naturally and properly fermented, is to be used. Wine made out of raisins, provided that from its colour and taste it may be judged to be pure, may be used (Collect. S. C. de Prop. Fide, n. 705). It may be white or red, weak or strong, sweet or dry. Since the validity of the Holy Sacrifice, and the lawfulness of its celebration, require absolutely genuine wine, it becomes the serious obligation of the celebrant to procure only pure wines. And since wines are frequently so adulterated as to escape minute chemical analysis, it may be taken for granted that the safest way of procuring pure wine is to buy it not at second hand, but directly from a manufacturer who understands and conscientiously respects the great responsibility involved in the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice. If the wine is changed into vinegar, or is become putrid or corrupted, if it was pressed from grapes that were not fully ripe, or if it is mixed with such a quantity of water that it can hardly be called wine, its use is forbidden (Missale Rom., De Defectibus, tit. iv, 1). If the wine begins to turn into vinegar, or to become putrid, or if the unfermented juice is pressed from the grape, it would be a grievous offence to use it, but it is considered valid matter (ibid., 2). To conserve weak and feeble wines, and in order to keep them from souring or spoiling during transportation, a small quantity of spirits of wine (grape brandy or alcohol) may be added, provided the following conditions are observed (1) The added spirit (alcohol) must have been distilled from the grape (ex genimime vitis); (2) the quantity of alcohol added, together with that which the wine contained naturally after fermentation, must not exceed eighteen per cent of the whole; (3) the addition must be made during the process of fermentation (S. Romana et Univ. Inquis., 5 August, 1896)."