

CARE AND MAINTENANCE OF SACRED VESSEL SURFACES

Communion Cups, Ciboria, Flagons, and Chalice can be made from different base materials and then plated with 24 kt gold or silver. Different materials require different cleaning and maintenance procedures. To protect your investment in these vessels, it is important to carefully follow the instructions outlined below.

In most cases, cups, chalices, and flagons are made from brass base metal, then plated 24kt gold or silver. The outside of the of the cup needs to be protected from fingerprint smudges, handling, and scratching in general, so a clear coat lacquer is applied after plating. The inside of the cup, chalice and flagon cannot be lacquered if the cup is manufactured to accepted liturgical guidelines, which means the Wine and Hosts are in direct contact with “precious” metals.

Cups, chalices, and flagons that are made from brass have problems over time with brass “pitting.” This is caused by imperfections in the base brass metal. Small holes in brass are common, and the plating will keep the wine away from the brass for a time. But every time the plated surface of the brass is cleaned, a small bit of gold is rubbed away, and eventually the wine tries to hide in the brass pits. Once inside the pit, the acid in the wine begins to eat away at the brass, and you will start to see small black spots on the inside of the cup, flagon or chalice. So it is important that the plated surface is not “aggressively” cleaned, but cleaned with the proper materials that will not cause the coating to disappear too fast over time.

Here are some care guidelines:

Never submerge the vessel in water or clean it in a dishwasher. Water that seeps into the base areas, or into the screw threads under the cup will not be completely dried out and the metal will begin showing signs of corrosion, or green areas where the water is allowed to attack the metal.

Always use a 100% cotton towel only. 100% cotton will not scratch the gold or silver surface if you only apply slight pressure when rubbing the surface. Some purification clothes are made with nylon content, and the nylon will scratch the plated surface. Make sure you do not use purificators with nylon content.

After mass, always use a very small amount of warm water with a little baking soda added. The baking soda will neutralize the acid in the wine and prevent the acid from eating away at the brass. If you do not have any baking soda, a mild dishwashing liquid will suffice. Wet a small area of the 100% cotton towel, and lightly rub the wet cloth on the inside of the vessel to clean the vessel of any wine residue. Put a little water in the vessel and swish it around (without submersing the vessel) then pour the solution into the secarium, not the city drain. Use the dry portion of the 100% cotton towel to dry off the surface that was just cleaned.

It is a good idea to use the same method for cleaning the outside of the vessel to remove any fingerprint oils that may have been left on the vessel. Once the outside surface is dried with the towel, make sure you do not handle it and smudge it again before putting the cups away for the day or week. You can purchase cotton glove liners or latex gloves at any drug store to help you properly handle the vessels.

Satin finished (otherwise know at brushed or sanded finishes) are less expensive to buy, but will retain water or wine in-between the ridges, which requires more effort to clean. A polished surface is easier to clean and dry since the surface is even.

When you are ready to clean your 100% cotton towel, you should rinse it out in you secarium sink, use soap if needed, and drain all of the water into the secarium. Then let the towel air dry for a day and it will be ready to use again. It is not a bad idea to keep the vessels inside a flannel bag or towel while they are not in use. This will delay the onset of tarnishing. If tarnishing occurs, then use a tarnish removing cloth to lightly rub away the tarnish. Be sure not to rub too hard or you will remove gold/silver as well.

Any vessels made from sterling silver will not have the “pitting” problem (as pitting is a reaction of water/wine to brass), but sterling can get scratched, and gold will still rub off, and finger smudges will make the surface look unsightly. So, please use the same care and maintenance steps outlined above for insure your vessels have a long and beautiful life for your church.

Finally, do not stack metal against metal. Always cover the surface with a towel or cloth if you want to stack your cups or ciboria for storage. Use stacking lids for your ciboria to store the ciboria in the tabernacle. Gold is a relatively soft metal and will scratch easily.