

Regarding the Wine Used for Mass

Red or White?

Nothing is specified canonically as to whether the wine is to be a red, a white or a blush. This determination is left to the individual community. The general consensus, however, is that most people prefer a wine that is a bit sweet and fruity. What is indicated is that to be considered valid sacramental matter the wine is to be natural and made from grapes (cf. Canon 924 §3). Wine made from any fruit other than grapes is considered invalid matter.

Alcohol Content

A minimum or maximum level has never been specified in canonical literature since the revision of the Code of Canon Law in 1983; however, in the estimation of canonists, it usually falls somewhere below 20%. Generally speaking, the alcohol content for most commercially produced wines is between 8% and 17%.

If *mustum* were to be used it cannot have an alcohol content of less than 1%. Mustum is grape juice in which the fermentation process has begun, but has been suspended. Mustum is reserved for those who suffer from alcohol intolerance and permission to use mustum must be given by the local Ordinary on a case-by-case basis.

Additives

Canon 924 §3 states the wine must not be corrupt, i.e. it is to be pure and natural. In the United States there are state-mandated additives to all commercially produced wines to act as an anti-oxidant which preserves the natural good condition of the wine and retards spoilage. Sulfides are added in such small amounts that the Holy See has had no objection to them, since their presence does not corrupt the wine.

Conclusion

Any commercially produced wine (red, white or blush) may be used for sacramental wine so long as it falls within the parameters of being naturally made of grapes and having an alcohol content between 8% and 20%. The labeling of wine as “sacramental” or “altar” wine is a marketing strategy similar to that of “organic.” Any good house wine is fine and there are many good wines available in boxes or cubitainers, these have the advantage of lasting several weeks after opening because air is expelled and spoilage is retarded. Bottom line: the finer quality of wine, the better it is. This is an important consideration since the wine selected will become the Body and Blood of Christ.

This information has been compiled from a July 24, 2003 letter (Prot.N. 98/78-17498) issued by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, then-Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and as reported in the *NewsLetter*, vol. 39, November 2003, of the Committee on the Liturgy for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB Publishing, Washington, D.C.)