

What is the thing on the stand with the tabernacle that is small and round with a cross on the top?

It took me some searching, but I finally found the answer. I knew what it was used for, but not what it is called. It is called an ablution cup and is basically a covered finger bowl. The name comes from the Latin root *abluo* which means *to wash clean*. The cup is filled with water and is used to cleanse the fingers after handling the Eucharist, the Body of Christ. Normally there is a small towel, a purificator, next to the ablution cup to dry the fingers.

At mass, the priest symbolically washes his hands prior to consecrating the Eucharist. After communion, the fingers can again be washed to remove any particles of the host that may remain. It is not specifically called out in the General Instruction on the Roman Missal (GIRM) as something that must be done as part of the liturgy. The GIRM does say, however, “Whenever a fragment of the host adheres to his fingers, especially after the fraction or the Communion of the faithful, the priest is to wipe his fingers over the paten or, if necessary, wash them.” (GIRM #278) For this reason it is good practice to wash the fingers after distributing communion just in case fragments of the host may remain.

When Father or I purify the sacred vessels after communion, we have the altar server pour water over our fingers and into the chalice. This accomplishes the same result as using the ablution cup. When I purify the vessels, Father uses the ablution cup after he returns the ciboria to the tabernacle. The extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist (EMEs) can use the ablution cup, and should use it if they believe fragments of the Eucharist remain on their fingers.

Deacon Joe