

ENQUIRE WITHIN

Question: *I can't understand why, at the Service of the Veneration of the Cross on Good Friday, we only have the bread offered to us? I think that I could understand why either nothing at all could be offered or, alternatively, if both wine and bread were to be given. I understand that the bread represents Christ's body, therefore why should we NOT be given the blood (wine) too on Good Friday?*

Answer:

When I arrived at Holy Cross back in 1982, I started off simply continuing the general policies and practices of my predecessor, and I waited at least for a year to expire before contemplating the possibility of changing things.

One of the areas where I just continued previous policies was the observance of Holy Week, with its striking contrasts between the unusual manner of worshipping God when compared to our normal Sunday arrangements.

Just one aspect of the difference between the Holy Week special experience and the normal is how Good Friday is observed. Rather than Mass, in effect, after the Veneration of the Cross, we return to the mass of the previous evening, Maundy Thursday, and receive communion from the bread consecrated on that occasion.

The Catholic Encyclopaedia explains it all thus:

"The Most Holy Sacrament is now carried back to the altar in solemn procession, during which is sung the hymn "Vexilla Regis prodeunt" (The royal banners forward go). Arrived in the sanctuary the clergy go to their places retaining lighted candles, while the celebrant and his ministers ascend the altar and celebrate what is called the Mass of the Presanctified. This is not a Mass in the strict sense of the word, as there

is no consecration of the sacred species. The host which was consecrated in yesterday's Mass (hence the word presanctified) is placed on the altar, incensed, elevated ("that it may be seen by the people"), and consumed by the celebrant. It is substantially the Communion part of the Mass, beginning with the "Pater noster" which marks the end of the Canon. From the very earliest times it was the custom not to celebrate the Mass proper on Good Friday."

So, in the strict interpretation of the rules, it is only the celebrant who receives the species, not all the people.

In the olden days, many people would attend Mass without receiving communion because they had not undergone the preparations for receiving, such as confession.

It is the normal practice of the Roman Catholic Church to reserve drinking the wine in communion only to the priest. The origins of this practice are in the medieval church's view that to spill the wine would be a catastrophic desecration of the blood of Christ. So the practice of eating only the bread evolved and I suppose the Good Friday issue is a remnant of this historical matter.

The policy of bread only was under-pinned by another doctrine called Concomitance, which taught that whether one consumed the bread or wine, both body and blood were equally present in both species.

In essence there is no reason why only the bread should be used, apart from convenience of use. Perhaps the Worship Committee could review the theology and practice of Good Friday and make a recommendation to the PCC for discussion?

