

DAILY COMMUNION IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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Is it appropriate for the Roman Catholic Church in Wales to make available daily "Services of the Word and Communion" for communities which have been accustomed to the daily celebration of Mass, and where the falling number of clergy makes this impossible to sustain?

(i) A Note on Terminology

There is a danger, in talking about the Eucharist, that the words we choose to use are interpreted according to a particular ideology or school of thought, and may even be inherently ambiguous. In this essay, I will adopt the following terminology, for clarity.

- **Breaking of Bread** - the ritual practised in the early church when bread and wine were shared in memory of the paschal event, with or without an integral reading from the Hebrew Bible and/or memoirs of the apostles. (i.e. an *action*)
- **Mass** - any form of ritual where a Liturgy of the Word is followed by the consecration of bread and wine. (i.e. an *action*)
- **Eucharistic Prayer** - the thanksgiving prayer offered during a Mass in conjunction with the consecration.
- **Blessed Sacrament** - the consecrated bread, believed by the Catholic faithful to be the Body of Christ, Really Present under the form of bread. (i.e. an *thing*)
- **Communion** - (1) the action of the faithful in receiving the Blessed Sacrament as food. More properly called "Eucharistic Communion" in contradistinction to other forms of communion when Christians gather or act in solidarity to one another, but abbreviated for simplicity in this essay. (2) The Blessed Sacrament during the action of being received by the faithful as food.
- **Communion Service** - any service in which the Blessed Sacrament, consecrated at a previous Mass (or primitive Breaking of Bread), is distributed as Communion.
- **Service of the Word and Communion** - the specific form of service published by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales in 1996, whose form is similar to the celebration of Mass except for the omission of the Liturgy of the Eucharist and adaptations for non-ordained presidency.

The word "Eucharist" is best avoided, for in popular usage it can mean variously the Mass (an action), or the Blessed Sacrament (a thing), and in technical usage it refers to the prayer of thanksgiving.

(ii) The Problem: Practical Realities in Wales

In England and Wales, in the 1950s and 60s, there was a boom in priestly vocations and a rapid expansion in housing stock, causing the building of (small) new churches on many suburban estates.¹ Now that clergy numbers have fallen back to more typical historic levels (similar to the number of clergy per Mass-going Catholics in 1900) it is not possible to sustain the provision of a weekday Mass in all these buildings, and even the provision of Sunday Mass at recent levels is becoming untenable, if clergy abide by the canonical

¹ Leyshon, Gareth, unpublished research paper submitted for publication in *Briefing*.

norms² of not celebrating more than two Masses on weekdays, and three on Sundays and Holy Days.

It is inevitable, then, that these churches - or more specifically, the worshipping communities associated with these churches - cannot continue to enjoy the daily provision of Mass for that community to which they have become accustomed. One parish priest will find himself charged with the care of two or three parishes, and will have to make careful and pastoral decisions about where he is to celebrate Mass each day. What happens on the days when he is unavailable to a given community?

A different kind of problem is presented by the parish which used to be well endowed with clergy, and had several daily celebrations of Mass. One might suit shift workers, another the elderly residents of the parish, yet another might be available in the start of the lunch hour for the 9-to-5 workers. A priest might still be able to say Mass daily, but at which time? Choosing one slot will remove the option of Mass from those unable to attend at this particular time. Should worship of some sort be maintained in the other slots, and if so, of what form?

One form of service which might be offered, and in practice is widely offered, is the *Service of the Word and Communion* as published by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales in 1996. The form of this service is similar to the celebration of Mass, with the same readings and a broadly similar pattern up to the end of the Liturgy of the Word, after which the Lord's Prayer is said, and Communion is distributed immediately from the reserved Sacrament. Alternatively, other forms of liturgy (e.g. Morning or Evening Prayer from the Divine Office) or devotions (the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross) might be offered, in which case the faithful would not be able to receive Eucharistic Communion on a given day, or at their accustomed Mass time.

In practice, and in my experience, it seems that many members of a weekday congregation attend Mass because they desire to receive communion daily: the Service of the Word and Communion fulfils this desire. Not many people will come to a service where communion is not offered. On the other hand, a few parishioners may have a devotion to "being present at the sacrifice of the Mass" and will not come to a service of communion from the reserved sacrament.

At the level of personal piety, each Christian is free to find his or her own balance point. There are many "spiritualities" on offer in the church, often associated with the heritage of particular religious orders; since the body of Christ has many parts, each with their own function, this is part of the richness which keeps the body in full working order. Decisions about attending worship will be made by individuals. If Mary decides to go all the way to Cardiff for an evening Mass ("to be present at the sacrifice"), Joseph goes to Outer Newport for a communion service ("to receive Jesus"), and Martha remains in Central Newport for vespers ("to pray with my community") they have all made good decisions. Each of these options are theologically defensible and all have merit.

Worship, however, is a corporate act by a whole community, and those responsible for preparing and regulating worship make decisions which affect everyone. In particular, access to the Blessed Sacrament (as communion, or for adoration) is regulated. In Wales at the present time, Parish Priests, in consultation with their advisory councils, must make decisions about whether, and if so, when, to make available the Service of the Word and Communion. Such decisions should be based on sound theological, liturgical and pastoral principles, and it is these principles which we shall develop in this essay.

(iii) Sunday Worship and Daily Worship

- (a) Sundays vs. Weekdays

Since apostolic times, the norm for Christian worship has been for the whole community to gather on the Lord's Day for the Breaking of Bread. Mass is celebrated on Sunday, and the Sunday obligation is to attend

² Code of Canon Law, 1983, §905.

Mass. Today, however, Catholic communities in many parts of the world do not have access to a priest on Sunday, and this raises difficult questions, as we shall see below.³

This should also cause us to question whether a community should have more than one Mass on a Sunday, if the Mass is meant to be the gathering of the community. Bishop Homeyer of Hildesheim, Germany, has decreed that from Lent 2003, each parish in his diocese may celebrate only one Sunday Mass, unless a second is truly required because of numbers.⁴

Weekday services, by contrast, are voluntary acts of worship freely attended by a self-selecting subset of the faithful - in other words, some people, out of personal devotion, want to attend daily services. At present, the Western Church's "full" liturgy consists of five daily offices of psalms with readings and, except on Good Friday, a Mass for each day of the year. Voluntary attendance at these services might be called "liturgical devotion". Other pious exercises - "pious devotions" - are also made freely by the faithful.⁵

It would be useful to review the history of liturgical devotion, noting in particular the trends in daily celebration of Mass, and frequent communion by the faithful. In each case, we should seek the underlying theology for a given practice.

- (b) A Brief Historical Survey

Our earliest documentary evidence for the celebration of the Breaking of Bread is found in the Synoptic Gospels, Paul's *First Letter to the Corinthians* (I Cor 11:17-34), and the *Didache*. Luke and Paul offer us an early tradition in which the sharing of the cup precedes the breaking of bread, while Matthew and Mark portray what became the continuing tradition of consecrating the loaf first. The *Didache* follows the Luco-Pauline tradition of the first thanksgiving being made over the cup, and although there are two sections dealing with the Breaking of Bread - §§9-10, following directions for baptism, and §14, concerning the Lord's Day - it has been argued⁶ that these do not refer to distinct kinds of celebrations.

The four scriptural accounts include an institution narrative ("This is my body..."). There is no such narrative in the *Didache*, and indeed the Vatican has recently recognised⁷ that the ancient *Anaphora of Addai and Mari*, which contains no coherent institution narrative, is nevertheless a valid Eucharistic Prayer. Nor does the *Didache* show any clear theology of the "Real Presence" of Jesus in the substance of the loaf and contents of the cup; rather, the prayer-language indicates that the broken bread is a sign of the Church, the scattered community, as the Body of Christ.

We might note a development from the "Broken Bread as Church" theology of the *Didache*, through "This is my Body" in the Synoptic-Pauline tradition, into the "Bread of Life" theology of John 6. The Johannine tradition nevertheless preserves a strong "community" dimension in its account of the Last Supper with no breaking of bread narrative, but the record of the washing of feet. The four texts of the "institution narrative" tradition were made canonical by the early church, but the *Didache* and the *Anaphora of Addai and Mari* seem to witness to a more primitive practice.

The *Acts of the Apostles* provide a mixed message about the frequency of celebration. While Acts 2:46 indicates a daily form of breaking of bread,⁸ in Acts 20:7, the Sunday celebration is the norm. Patristic writings clearly attest the practice of the laity taking the "particles" home from the Sunday celebration and

³ van Beeck, Frans Jozef, "Praise and Thanksgiving in Noneucharistic Communion Services", 1986.

⁴ Steel, Geoffrey, "What do we do when we can't have Sunday Mass?", 2003.

⁵ cf. Congregation for Divine Worship, *Directory on Popular Piety*, 2001, §§7-10.

⁶ O'Loughlin, Tom, lecture to Cardiff clergy, June 5, 2003.

⁷ Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Guidelines for Admission to the Eucharist between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East*, 2001.

⁸ Baldovin, John F., "Reflections on the Frequency of Eucharistic Celebration", 1987.

“communicating themselves” at will.⁹ The practice of daily communion in the early church gradually evolved, in the West, into daily Mass - but this has never been the tradition of the Eastern Churches.¹⁰

John Baldwin,¹¹ in a brief survey of the frequency of the celebration of Mass throughout the history of the Western Church, finds that until mediaeval times, Mass was always celebrated for a *reason* - Sunday or a great feast, such as Epiphany; a wedding or funeral; the “birthday” of a saint, etc.. Even when the calendar became so full of saints there was a daily reason to celebrate, each day still had its reason. He suggests a danger that in treating the consecrated bread and wine as a sacred *thing*, Mass is celebrated for the sake of the Mass rather than to mark a community occasion.

In mediaeval times, monastic communities of both men and women celebrated “Communion Services”: the written orders which survive show that the form of service was neither a “Mass” with the Eucharistic Prayer stripped out, nor one requiring a Liturgy of the Word (the monastic communities already celebrated the Word many times each day). Rather, other prayers, and sometimes psalms, are prescribed for before and after communion. Their rationale for having communion apart from Mass was their understanding that receiving communion effects healing and the forgiveness of sins.¹²

During the second millennium of Western Christianity, there was a steady drift towards an emphasis on the Blessed Sacrament as a holy *thing*. By 1215, the time of the Fourth Lateran Council, the popular understanding of the holiness of Eucharistic communion was such that it was necessary to oblige the faithful to make confession and receive communion once a year, lest they refrain from receiving at all.¹³ Safer than daring to receive communion was to participate in Eucharistic devotions: the Feast of Corpus Christi was established for the universal church in the 14th Century following its initial approbation by Urban IV in 1264.¹⁴ By the time of the Council of Trent (1545-63), the rite of receiving communion was dissociated from the celebration of Mass to the extent of using only hosts from the tabernacle for the congregation’s communion, even for worshippers attending Mass.¹⁵

By the 19th century, following the scrupulous era of Jansenism,¹⁶ the Western “norm of piety” was daily attendance at Mass, but without receiving communion.¹⁷ The tide began to turn with Pope St Pius X’s pronouncement, in 1905,¹⁸ reminding the faithful that “the Holy Council [of Trent] wishes indeed that at each Mass the faithful who are present should communicate, not only in spiritual desire, but sacramentally, by the actual reception of the Eucharist.” In §2, Pope Pius set out what constitutes the right intention for receiving frequent communion: “he who approaches the Holy Table should do so, not out of routine, or vain glory, or human respect, but that he wish to please God, to be more closely united with Him by charity, and to have recourse to this divine remedy for his weakness and defects.” Pius XII reaffirmed the practice of frequent communion in his encyclical of 1943.¹⁹

In summary, after the primitive era of the daily Breaking of Bread, Mass was generally celebrated only on Sundays and significant occasions. Regular communion from the reserved sacrament was an accepted practice. The developing mediaeval understanding of the Mass as a holy and efficacious ritual resulted in a new cult of daily celebration of the sacrifice by priests, while fear of the holiness of the Blessed Sacrament

⁹ Leclercq, Jean, “Eucharistic Celebrations Without Priests in the Middle Ages”, 1981.

¹⁰ Baldwin, *op. cit.*.

¹¹ *Op cit.*

¹² Leclercq, *op. cit.*.

¹³ van Beeck, Frans Jozef, *op. cit.*.

¹⁴ E. A. Livingstone, *Oxford Concise Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2000, p. **146**.

¹⁵ van Beeck, Frans Jozef, *op. cit.*.

¹⁶ See e.g. Livingstone, *op. cit.*, p. **300**.

¹⁷ Baldwin, *op. cit.*.

¹⁸ Pius X, *Sacra Tridentina*, 1905.

¹⁹ Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, 1943, §84.

inspired the faithful to Eucharistic devotion with infrequent reception of Communion. Trent exhorted the faithful to communicate at Mass, but this was only implemented from the early 20th century.

- (c) Current Theology and Norms

Current Catholic teaching and practice is defined largely by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and the liturgical reforms which followed it, and by the long papacy and writings of John Paul II. Following two millennia of the development of doctrine and liturgical experience, Catholic teaching asserts the following truths. A particular practice need not necessarily emphasise a particular point from this list, but must not contradict it.

- The Mass is a sacrifice, the one unique sacrifice of Christ made present on the altar wherever Mass is celebrated.²⁰
- Christ is present in many ways during liturgy: in the reading of Scripture, the prayer of the gathered community, the person of the ordained minister, and “especially” in the Blessed Sacrament.²¹
- The elements consecrated at Mass are no longer bread and wine, but the body and blood of Jesus Christ, who is said to be Really Present under these forms. The change effected at consecration may be rightly called transubstantiation.²²
- The Blessed Sacrament may properly be worshipped as Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Godhead.²³
- Receiving communion (at Mass or otherwise) is efficacious for the forgiveness of venial sins, growth in grace, and closer union with Jesus Christ.²⁴
- The Mass may be offered for an “intention” for the living or the dead, and is efficacious in speeding a holy soul from purgatory into heaven.²⁵

In addition, the Church prescribes the following norms:

- The faithful are obliged to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days.²⁶ (In practice, many communities without priests cannot do so.²⁷)
- Consequently, priests should celebrate Sunday Mass sufficiently often to offer the faithful a reasonable opportunity to fulfil this precept.²⁸
- Nevertheless, priests may not celebrate more than two Masses on weekdays, and three on Sundays and Holy Days.²⁹ (In practice, for this purpose, a Saturday evening Mass, which fulfils the Sunday Obligation, is regarded as a Mass celebrated on Saturday, so that the priest may also celebrate three Masses on the Sunday.)
- As a bare minimum, each member of the faithful should make confession and receive communion once a year, during the Easter Season.³⁰
- Communion should in practice be received by any Catholic not impeded from doing so whenever that

²⁰ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 2003, §§11-14.

²¹ Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 1963, §7.

²² *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §15.

²³ cf. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §25.

²⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1992, §§1391-1394.

²⁵ Congregation for Divine Worship, *Directory on Popular Piety*, 2001, §251.

²⁶ Code of Canon Law, §1249.

²⁷ van Beeck, Frans Jozef, *op. cit.*.

²⁸ John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, 1998, §49.

²⁹ Code of Canon Law, 1983, §905.

³⁰ Code of Canon Law, §920.

person attends at Mass, subject to the restriction that one should not receive communion more than twice in one day.³¹

- Communion apart from Mass may not be refused to the faithful who reasonably ask for it.³²
- The devotional practice of daily communion, approved by St Pius X in 1905 and Pope Pius XII in 1943, is also encouraged by the new *Catechism* (§1390).
- Priests are urged to celebrate Mass daily, but not more than once daily, even if no congregation can be present on a particular day.³³ They should have at least one person present, except for a good and reasonable cause.³⁴ (In practice, personal devotion is sufficient reason when no other person can be present.)

It seems, then, that daily communion (at Mass where possible) is the “norm” of Catholic practice urged upon the ordinary priest and the pious layperson, and weekly communion on the Lord’s Day (plus a small number of obligatory Holy Days) is the baseline norm for all Catholics.

- (d) Some Questions

We noted above that the Sunday Mass is meant to be the gathering of the whole community. Is a weekday Mass also meant to gather everyone together? If so, shouldn’t a community have only one Mass per day?

Even one daily celebration is challenged by Baldovin,³⁵ who judges that the daily celebration of “Low Mass” eroded the solemnity given in practice to the Sunday Celebration. He suggests that the order of service of daily Mass, if celebrated, should be markedly different from Sundays; he is not hostile to the idea of a daily communion service, but notes that this again risks treating the Eucharist as a sacred *thing*. Given this understanding, he argues, a priest’s private celebration of Mass is never appropriate, and the practice of having a stipended intention when in fact the Mass is offered for many universal intentions, is highly questionable. Baldovin concludes: “Daily Mass, as a matter of course, is too much of a good thing.”

(iv) Considering Communion Services

- (a) on Sundays

There is very little literature published concerning the question of weekday communion services. Many of the articles which do appear in print consider the problem of Sunday worship where no priest is available. Geoffrey Steel³⁶ notes the three competing values of meeting on Sunday, celebrating the Eucharist, and gathering as a particular community, and Thomas Faucher³⁷ broadens this in finding six areas worth considering:

- **Sunday:** can the Lord’s Day be the “Resurrection Day” without someone to celebrate the Paschal Mystery? Is it better to meet for prayer without Mass on Sunday, or Mass on a weekday when the priest can come?
- **The Faith Community:** if a town has no priest, should they meet as a town for prayer on Sunday, or go to the nearest town where Mass is available? (Lawrence Flinn³⁸ suggests that to commute in this way is tantamount to denial of the other forms of Christ’s presence. In Africa, the whole community, including the sick and elderly, would commute for major festivals, but otherwise celebrate by meeting to thank and praise God as a community.)

³¹ Code of Canon Law, §917; authentic interpretation of same, 26 June 84.

³² Code of Canon Law, §918.

³³ Code of Canon Law, §904.

³⁴ Code of Canon Law, §908.

³⁵ Baldovin, *op. cit.*.

³⁶ Steel, *op. cit.*.

³⁷ Faucher, W. Thomas, “Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest, Some Observations”, 1991.

³⁸ Flinn, Lawrence, “Sunday Without a Priest”, 1998.

- **The Eucharist:** is it a *thing* - Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament - in which case a “communion service” makes sense? Or is it an *action*, a communal act of thanksgiving, in which case receiving the elements makes no sense apart from the *eucharistic* prayer of thanks? Robert Hovda³⁹ argues against the reception of communion outside Mass, stressing the importance of blessing, breaking and sharing one bread and one cup, without recourse to the reserved sacrament.
- **Priesthood:** what does it mean for a man to be ordained priest but not presiding over the community he belongs to? What does it mean for a community to gather over the long term for prayer without the services of a priest, or (and Anne Inman⁴⁰ also questions the appropriateness of this) with a priest who plays no other part in that community?
- **Church Authority:** who is responsible for the supply of priests (admission to ordination and permission to celebrate)? Who is responsible for training and regulating lay leaders who preside at prayer?
- **The Meaning and Purpose of Worship:** For all but the liturgically aware lay person, is there any difference in the experience of attending a Communion Service on the one hand, and Mass with both a mumbled Eucharistic prayer and communion from the tabernacle, on the other? Or is it the “human” elements, the quality of the preaching, the dignity of the celebration, etc., which really “matters” to the congregation?

The Vatican’s own norms on *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*⁴¹ dictate:

- If it is possible for the community to travel to attend Mass elsewhere, or to attend a local Mass in another language, they should do so. (§§18, 21)
- When this is not possible, a Sunday gathering may be held, but only one such gathering. It is recommended that this use the readings and prayers for the day’s Mass, and that communion be distributed if available. (§§19-21, 28, 33)

Thus the Holy See proposes a hierarchy of values: attendance at Sunday Mass is paramount, wherever feasible, and is indeed the canonical obligation; the second best option is for the whole community to meet together once to observe the Lord’s Day. A rare visit by a priest on a weekday is a happy occasion for an additional celebration of Mass which is complementary to the Sunday worship gathering.

- (b) as the Daily Service

The rationale for a daily communion service is quite distinct from that for a Sunday Celebration. We saw above that the “norm” of popular piety is receiving daily communion, and indeed there is a canonical right to receive communion when reasonably requested. Baldovin did not oppose daily communion in principle, and it is worth noting that the Eastern Churches, by an ancient custom, do not celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice on Wednesday and Friday in Lent, but celebrate the “Mass of the Presanctified” instead⁴² – in other words, a communion service.

Anne Inman⁴³ writes of her parish’s experience of beginning weekday celebrations in the absence of their priest, where they found that the daily communion service was not experienced as a “replacement” for the Mass they couldn’t have, but as a means of sustaining their community in working, living and praying together.

On the other hand, Steel notes that the Roman Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest considers only Sundays, and does not direct that there should be weekday celebrations. He wonders whether

³⁹ Hovda, Robert W., “The Amen Corner: Priestless Sundays Reconsidered”, 1988.

⁴⁰ Inman, Anne, “ ‘When the Priest’s Away’ ”, 1985.

⁴¹ Congregation for Divine Worship, *Directory on Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, 1988.

⁴² Livingstone, *op. cit.*, p. 464.

⁴³ Inman, *op. cit.*.

daily Communion Services diminish respect for what the Sunday Mass is?

Many of these principles presuppose a clear identity for the Sunday worshipping community. In urban situations, this is complicated by the fact that it is difficult to establish a clear identity of the “parish community”. Given the mobility of the faithful who live within one parish’s boundary but worship in another church, there may be little direct relationship between domicile and place of worship. Further, where there is more than one Sunday Mass in a particular building, each “Eucharistic Community” has a distinct identity in practice, since regular attendees at one Mass will only meet people from other Masses on Holy Days or at parish events. Working people (or shoppers) may worship in one place on weekdays and a different church on Sundays.

(v) Deciding for the Community

(a) Principles

Very often in Catholic theology, truth is identified not by a positive dogmatic definition of what is the case, but rather by the establishment of boundaries beyond which lie error, on pain of anathema. There is a legitimate, but restricted, pluralism of opinion and expression within the boundaries of definition. Thus we can speak of the incarnation in any terms which do not deny that Jesus Christ was both fully man and fully divine; we may hold different opinions on whether the Virgin Mary physically died or not so long as we affirm that “at the end of her earthly life” her body was taken up to heaven. There is a similar legitimate diversity in the field of liturgy.

In popular opinion and debate, the competing theologies of the Mass are a “high” view which emphasises the Mass as a *sacrifice* and the essential role of the ordained priesthood, versus a “low” emphasis on the Mass as a *meal* and the gathering of the community, the People of God who themselves constitute the Body of Christ. Similarly every celebration of Mass must try to express both the intimate love and the awesome transcendence of our God. There are different ways of expressing these truths, none of which can be rejected for the fullest understanding of our faith, but any given celebration of Mass or Divine Office will place the spotlight on some particular balance of these theologies. The choice of Latin or the vernacular, whether the priest stands facing the people, whether incense is used, the range of participation by the congregation - each of these is realised in some concrete way by a liturgical celebration, and highlights one theology at the expense of another.

There is a saying: “the good is the enemy of the best”. This in fact works both ways, and always opting for a best might deprive a community of the opportunity to taste a good alternative. We profess that Jesus is present in the worshipping community in many ways,⁴⁴ “especially” in the Blessed Sacrament. This demands a proper investment of time and effort in the cult of the Blessed Sacrament: Mass, exposition, the decoration of the tabernacle. How, then, do we assert and focus on the presences of Christ in the Word proclaimed, in the ordained minister, in each baptised Christian, in the gathered community? What is the appropriate balance of Eucharistic worship and services of the Word alone? We must remember, when we speak of “communion”, that we must distinguish Eucharistic communion - receiving Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament - with the horizontal communion of worshipping together with our fellow parishioners.

No service in church is obligatory, except the Sunday and Holy Day Mass - and even then, the worshipper may be able to choose from several celebrations with different “flavours” in terms of music and solemnity of celebration. But liturgy is, by its very nature, a corporate act of worship. In this case, those charged with planning and preparing liturgy (including, but not limited to, the celebration of Mass) must strive to make it inclusive of all those in attendance. A liturgy celebrated for a community defined by a geographical border (a parish) or a particular life-situation (chaplancy) will draw a broad cross-section of worshippers of many theological hues. No-one should feel excluded by the way in which their local liturgy is celebrated;

⁴⁴ Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 1963, §7.

nevertheless, the way in which the liturgy is planned will necessarily place it at a particular point on the spectrum of theological truths which might be highlighted. It is important to be aware of the inherent bias in any particular service, and over the long term to ensure that a counterbalance is offered, e.g. through preaching.

- **(b) Solutions**

One must be cautious in proposing future practice based on history. On the one hand, the early church emphasis on “shared loaf and cup as symbol of community” might be supposed to be in closest touch with the message transmitted by Christ to His apostles. On the other, the concept of “development of doctrine” suggests that we should not belittle our enriched understanding of the Real Presence, nor the value of “Eucharistic devotions”, even though these were not features of the primitive church. Despite Baldwin’s objections, the daily celebration of Mass for its own sake is a legitimate response to the developing awareness of the Mass as an efficacious sacrifice.

In the 20th century, as we have seen, the Western Church has urged the faithful to daily communion. Under the current Canon Law, the faithful have the right to receive communion apart from Mass where they reasonably request it; and in a parish where the faithful have been accustomed to communicating at daily Mass, there would seem to be a well-established devotional practice of daily communion, tantamount to such a request. It would seem, therefore, that offering a daily Service of the Word and Communion when Mass is not possible, is within the mind of the church.

Solution 1: promote Masses elsewhere

One possible solution to the unavailable priest, whether in a particular place or a particular time-slot, is for there to be active promotion of the celebration of Mass somewhere else. This could involve publicity via the parish bulletin, and perhaps also a scheme to make transport available to parishioners without their own vehicles.

In the case of two or three parishes sharing one priest, this priest provides a natural link. Should the parishioners “follow Father” around his peripatetic circuit? This demands a closer look at the viability of each Eucharistic community. Apart from the provision of clergy, is each community going to remain large enough, for the foreseeable future, to maintain its own property and to gather for social, charitable and spiritual purposes? If the community is shrinking below this point, and geography and mobility do not make it impossible, then it is time for the separate parishes to start forging a new identity as a united community - despite the great inertia which human beings naturally feel against any change to their present identity.

But suppose the several parishes are large enough to be self-sustaining. If they adopt a policy of promoting Mass elsewhere, this places a sharp focus on the cult of the Mass. It fosters the attitude of, “It’s the Mass that matters”, or even, “Mass or nothing!”. For such a community, their Sunday homilist must remind them of the importance of worshipping God in other ways, and as a distinct community; and some significant events in the life of that community should be marked by non-Eucharistic celebrations. The parish should also invest in the formation of those of its members willing to prepare, and preside at, gatherings for worship.

In the case of the busy parish reduced to one daily Mass, the weekly pattern of Mass times should give a fair opportunity to all the would-be daily communicants, noting that the elderly are most able to attend mid-morning celebrations, while workers require early morning or evening Mass. In Wales, such parishes are normally in urban settings; it would be prudent if neighbouring parishes could dovetail their schedules so that early morning or evening Masses were available on as many weekdays as possible. It might not be appropriate for a given parish to advertise the neighbouring Mass times (this raises the thorny issue of community identity in the urban setting), but the dovetailing would assist the workers who try to attend their own parish whenever possible but failing that, on their own legitimate initiative, seek Mass elsewhere.

In rural settings where the distances involved are too great, or where the local mentality includes a psychological barrier against travel to the next town, the solution of promoting a neighbouring Mass may not be possible.

Solution 2: provide non-Eucharistic worship

A different solution is to maintain the time-slot(s) currently used for daily Mass, but to fill them with forms of worship which do not require a priest, *and at which communion is not distributed*. This requires a programme of formation for the lay leaders who will preside. The response to these services will immediately reveal which parishioners attend daily worship for the sake of receiving Eucharistic communion or being present at the Eucharistic sacrifice, as opposed to desiring to worship God corporately with their community.

These other forms of worship are good in their own right. The only negative aspect of this solution is that it denies the faithful access to daily communion, which is a devotion “recommended” by the Church herself, and to which the faithful have a reasonable right. If the faithful ask for daily communion, and there are parishioners able and competent to lead Services of the Word and Communion, under what circumstances is it unreasonable to refuse?

Solution 3: provide Services of the Word and Communion

The third solution is to provide Services of the Word and Communion. Should we apply the same principles on weekdays as the Directory lays down for Sunday Celebrations - namely that attending Mass elsewhere is to be preferred, and only to hold one celebration each day?

Now the weekday congregation is not the entire “gathered community” in the same way as a Sunday congregation - rather, the weekday worshippers attend as an act of devotion, and because their other duties do not preclude corporate worship. If attending Mass elsewhere is preferred above a local Communion Service even on Sunday, the day for the community’s gathering, then it must surely be preferred on weekdays too, when the gathering is a voluntary devotion. (It is worth remembering that in Catholic theology, the fundamental unit of the “local church” is a diocese, not a parish, even though in practice people gather as parish communities, or “Eucharistic communities” within a parish where there is more than one Sunday Mass.)

If, however, the nearest Mass is too far away, then a Communion Service is a legitimate option. May more than one daily service be held? The rule against multiplying Sunday services is rooted in the idea of the community gathering all together on the Lord’s Day, and might not hold on weekdays. And while there is a certain ideal that the gathering of the whole people is an important sign which the faithful bring to Mass, the Communion Service, by definition, is not Mass. Rather, it is participation by extension, in a Mass already celebrated. Since there is a canonical right to communion when reasonably requested, a communion service may be held as many times in a day as reasonably requested - i.e. to accommodate the elderly, shoppers and workers who are constrained by ability or duty rather than convenience.

The current form of the Communion Service is very similar to Mass, but without the Eucharistic Prayer. This leads to the danger that the faithful might not understand the difference, and start thinking of it as a “short Mass” – which also has consequences for the faithful’s understanding of the ministerial priesthood. This flaw is lessened to an extent if the format is changed, e.g. by conflating the Communion Service with a celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours. On the other hand, the addition of a thanksgiving prayer (common in some countries⁴⁵ and permitted by the Vatican⁴⁶) mirrors even more closely the structure of the Mass. It is

⁴⁵ Henderson, Frank, “When Lay People Preside at Sunday Worship”, 1984.

⁴⁶ Congregation for Divine Worship, *Directory on Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, 1988,

clearly necessary for the preparation and preaching offered to the community to cover the three values which are held in tension: the sacrifice of the Mass itself, the spiritual benefit of receiving communion, and the other presences of Christ in the worshipping community.

What of the case of an urban parish reduced to one daily Mass? The faithful's canonical right is to communion, not Mass, so it would seem that again, where there are competent lay leaders and a reasonable request is made, a communion service may be held to accommodate the devotion of those who genuinely cannot attend that day's Mass. Following this logic, the same right would seem to apply even in parishes which have historically held only one daily celebration of Mass. In these cases, the daily Mass should be celebrated in such a way as to emphasise the value of the sacrifice, while the leader of the communion service should comment from time to time on the way in which this service is an extension of the one and daily sacrifice.

The danger of the daily communion service, is that it exalts the Blessed Sacrament ("This is the Body of Christ") at the expense of highlighting other forms of Christ's presence, and where there is more than one daily service or Mass, damages the sign of unity ("We are the Body of Christ"). Making available "communion on demand" offers a form of devotion which is about "me and Jesus" rather than the emphasising, as the primitive church did, "us as community". A counterbalancing element is needed somewhere in the life of the worshipping community.

(vi) Conclusion

Is it appropriate for the Roman Catholic Church in Wales to make available daily "Services of the Word and Communion" for communities which have been accustomed to the daily celebration of Mass, and where the falling number of clergy makes this impossible to sustain?

Services of the Word and Communion on weekdays are appropriate where limitations of mobility and duty prevent the faithful from being able to attend the nearest Mass. The faithful have a right to communion when they reasonably request it.

Receiving communion is a spiritually fruitful, and so desirable, devotional act in itself, even apart from the celebration of Mass. That said, a counterbalance to the implicit theology of the Communion Service should be offered as follows: Pastors should remind the faithful that they should attend Mass if possible, since the value of being present at the sacrifice outweighs the value of gathering with one's local community, or factors of mere convenience of place or time. Mass is an act of thanksgiving in a way which a Communion Service cannot equal. Pastors should also be aware of the need to emphasise the other forms of Christ's presence, and to remind the faithful that the communion they share is also a sign of their unity with their absent brothers and sisters.

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