

Communion services should only be celebrated in exceptional circumstances

(Editor's note: This column by Father Patrick Beidelman takes the place in this issue of the usual "Question Corner" column by Father Kenneth Doyle.)

Over the last couple of decades, many faithful Catholics' love for the Eucharist and their desire to receive Holy Communion



daily (or at least more than once each week) has led some of them to use what was intended as an exceptional practice as their normal, regular way to receive Holy Communion during the week.

"Communion Services" in these cases use what is called the Rite for Distributing Holy Communion Outside Mass with a Celebration of the Word and have often been utilized when a Mass cannot be offered by a priest on a specific day or at a specific time of day (e.g. many priests take Monday as a "day away" from the parish and Mass is not offered when he is away.) In a few instances, so-called "Communion Services" are offered daily in addition to a daily Mass, oftentimes at an earlier hour than Mass.

However, this is not how our tradition envisions that the faithful would ordinarily receive Holy Communion.

In fact, the Church has consistently taught that the normative way to receive Holy Communion is within Mass, the full celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy in which we commemorate the Last Supper and represent the Lord Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Therefore, it is laudable for a parish family to address the circumstances that arise when Communion Services are no longer exceptional but have become normal, regularly scheduled celebrations in which many of the faithful participate.

Here's the relevant law from the Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church regarding the time, place and way that Holy Communion should be received:

Canon 918: "It is highly recommended that the faithful receive Holy Communion during the Eucharistic celebration itself. It is to be administered outside the Mass, however, to those who request it for a just cause, with the liturgical rites being observed."

The "just cause" that is referred to in this canon relates to exceptional cases, such as when someone is in danger of death (Anointing of the Sick/Viaticum) or when someone isn't able to get to Mass on a regular basis because of age or infirmity.

In those instances, Holy Communion is brought to them. Occasionally, it is also permissible for Holy Communion to be offered outside of Mass when a community is gathered for Mass but the priest fails to show up.

Because there are so many opportunities in many places throughout the archdiocese to go to Mass, Communion Services are discouraged as a regular practice. It is especially encouraged that parishes in a particular area cooperate to see that Masses are offered at a variety of times and on all days throughout the week.

Cooperation in this regard allows us to uphold the centrality and the importance of the Mass as the source from which the benefits of the sacrifice of the cross so richly flow. Communion Services are not an ideal solution to the shortage of priests and Masses/Mass times.

Those responsible for coordinating Mass times should only choose to have Communion Services on a very temporary basis (e.g. when a priest in a remote area is away on vacation and is unable to find another priest to cover during that week.) Praying a part of the Liturgy of the Hours is also encouraged when Mass can't be offered.

Resources like www.ebreviary.com even supply prepared booklets that may be printed out for use by a congregation for this kind of occasion. In all things, we should take care not to surrender to mere convenience by having a Communion Service in place of offering or seeking out the celebration of the Mass. The Mass and the fruits of the Mass are too important and too central to our faith life to allow this.

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