

Question by Fr Henry Mario, Cmf:

My Lord, the now famous “Crossover Night” or “31 December Night” is gradually becoming a confusing phenomenon in the Catholic Church. My worry is where to place this practice and the particular liturgy to be celebrated. Since the liturgical year begins with the first Sunday of Advent, is 1 January a New Year according to the civil calendar as well as the church’s calendar? Again, if 31 December falls within the Christmas Octave and the evening of the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, what should be celebrated in the Mass or liturgy during the so-called 31 December or Crossover Night? Does that not confuse the teaching of the Catholic liturgical calendar? If it does, why do we still encourage such practices? And are we being directed by the world or we are to direct the world? Again, are we do what the people want or what the church wants and teaches?

Answer by Bishop Joseph Osei-Bonsu:

A similar question was put some time ago by Fr. Joseph Aduse Poku in Rome. The answer given here will reflect some of the ideas in the answer given to his question.

New Year’s Eve Celebration

New Year’s Eve is the last day of the year and the day before New Year’s Day, which marks the start of a new year according to the Gregorian calendar. Pope Gregory XIII introduced the Gregorian calendar in 1582. It was adopted immediately in some areas of Europe but it was not used in various countries until even centuries later.

New Year’s Eve festivities can be traced back to celebrations in Europe that date back before Christianity spread. When many inhabitants in Europe were converted to Christianity, these festivals were merged with Christian beliefs and in time came to mark holidays such as the New Year’s Eve and New Year celebrations. Some people today celebrate New Year’s Eve by attending midnight church services, while others gather around in public venues such as Times Square in New York City or Trafalgar Square in London to count down for the closing seconds of the old year. Many people hold parties to bid farewell to the finishing year and to celebrate the New Year.

Many people start counting down to New Year’s Day in the last minute or seconds before the last night of the year ends and the New Year begins. Some people tune into watching televised countdowns. As the clock strikes midnight into New Year’s Day, many people celebrate this event by exchanging hugs, kisses, and wish each other a “Happy New Year”. In some parts of the world, many people sing the

Scottish song “Auld Lang Syne” (literally “old long since”) during the New Year’s Eve celebrations.

New Year’s Eve Celebration in Ghana

In Ghana, we also appreciate the coming of a New Year, even if we are not sure of what it will bring to us. Our mood is one of gratitude for the year gone past and expectation of better things to come in the New Year. It is for these reasons that most Ghanaian Christians want to go to church on New Year’s Eve. In many places, the faithful want to let the midnight of New Year’s Eve find them in church so that they can usher in the New Year. However, the liturgy of New Year’s Eve, as we have it at the moment, does not reflect these sentiments. Liturgically, 31 December is an ordinary day and the readings are not about thanksgiving. Indeed, in most places in Europe and North America, there is no Mass in the evening to celebrate the coming of the New Year as we do in Ghana. Since many people in Ghana attach great significance to this day, it will be good if the National Liturgical Commission could come out with a special liturgy for the evening Mass on this day. The Commission may want to suggest readings that deal with the theme of thanksgiving. In the Old Testament, a passage like Isaiah 63:7-9 that talks about what the Lord has done for Israel might be considered. The gospel reading, for example, could be the passage about the cure of the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19) in which the Samaritan leper went back to thank Jesus for his cure.

It is up to every parish to plan what can be done both before and after Mass to reflect the mood of joy and thanksgiving. In many places, we find cultural singing and dancing before Mass starts. In some places also, the youth or women’s groups stage plays before the celebration of Mass. With regard to the celebration of the Mass itself, it will be a good idea if Mass ends just before midnight so that midnight will find the church members in church and so enable them to celebrate the New Year by singing and dancing. However, in some places in Ghana, security concerns at night may make it necessary for Mass to be celebrated early *in anticipation* of New Year so that people can go home early and safely.

The Mass celebrated on 31 December, even if it goes beyond midnight, does not replace the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, that is celebrated on 1 January. This is a Solemnity and must be celebrated in the morning of 1 January. We should also bear in mind that while the civil calendar begins on 1 January and ends on 31 December, the Church’s liturgical year begins on the first Sunday of Advent and ends with the 34th week of the year.

In connection with 31 December, we Catholics should retain our Catholic identity and should not imitate what some Charismatic and Pentecostal churches do. The language of “Crossover” and “Passover” in this connection is alien to our Catholic

worship and theology. While 31 December is significant as far as our civil calendar is concerned, it is not significant as far as the Church's liturgical calendar is concerned. In preparation for this event, some pastors belonging to these Charismatic and Pentecostal churches erect massive billboards with their pictures on them and with themes such as "31st December: The Crossover", "31st December: The Passover". Catholic priests should resist the temptation to advertise themselves in this fashion. If anyone needs to be advertised, it should be Jesus himself! In connection with this, in December 2018, I saw on one *WhatsApp* platform a poster with the picture of a Catholic priest and a theme similar to what I have mentioned above. This should not happen. Our mode of entering the new civil year is the Holy Mass and not through a Crossover or a Passover service!

For further explanations or enquiries, you may contact the author, Most Rev. Joseph Osei-Bonsu, Catholic Bishop of Konongo-Mampong, on this number: 0244488904, or on WhatsApp (with the same number). Email: bishop@kmdiocese.org