

# Good Friday – Veneration of a Cross or Crucifix?



For many years, the Catholic faithful recall the Veneration of the Cross during the Good Friday liturgy. Since the November 2011 revision to the Roman Missal, the question has been raised: ***On Good Friday, are we to venerate a cross or a crucifix with the image of Christ upon it?***

While the document “*Built of Living Stones*” (published in 2000), states that we may venerate a cross or crucifix, the current General Instruction to the Roman Missal (GIRM) refers to a “cross” and not a “crucifix”, as the object of veneration during the Good Friday liturgy.

Over the years, some have posited that to understand why it is a cross (not a crucifix) that we should venerate on Good Friday is to reflect back upon the history and early tradition of the Church’s Good Friday devotion (circa 4c AD): following Queen Helena’s (the mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine) reportedly finding the wood of the True Cross; the numerous pilgrimages to venerate the True Cross that followed; and the language of the Good Friday ritual itself, in which the priest or deacon sing: “Behold the wood of the cross, on which hung the Savior of the World” during its procession into the worship space. Taken in totality, it is lacking in theological and liturgical understanding of faith practices, devotions, signs and symbols.

On Good Friday, this tradition in the Church began by at least the end of the 4th century AD, when the Spanish pilgrim Egeria wrote about celebrating Good Friday at Golgotha. She spent Holy Week in Jerusalem not too long after St. Helena’s discoveries of the True Cross. A devotion to the Cross flourished and relics of the True Cross were being disseminated and venerated around the world. Pilgrimages to sacred sites multiplied and Egeria recorded in her journals, detailed descriptions of the celebration of the Veneration of the True Cross at Golgotha.

Additionally, reflecting back to the original Latin Missal texts, the word ***Crux*** (crucifix) is used throughout—not ***Cross***. (For example, (GIRM #308) “Item super altare vel prope ipsum crux, cvm effigie Christi crucifixi, habeatur, quae a populo congregato bene conspiciatur.” ... (Likewise, on the altar or near it, there is to be a Cross with the likeness of Christ crucified, which is easily seen by the congregation. ... ))

Since the “wood” of the Holy Cross already has its own set liturgical feast day (the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on September 14th), therefore, after recent consultation with Bishop Sheridan, it is the Church’s continued and preferred faith devotional practice to permit a parish to utilize a Crucifix—in place of a plain Cross—for the Veneration of the Cross in the Good Friday liturgy.

After all: The point of Good Friday is not merely to venerate the wood of the Holy Cross—that once bore the source of our salvation—it is to venerate Christ crucified: *Christus Crucifixus*.