



6. Why Is Water Mixed With The Communion Wine?

In Classical times, wine was extremely strong, and had to be mixed with water before drinking. The drinking of unwatered wine was looked on as the last stage of decadence and debauchery. As at the wedding at Cana, the 'master of the feast' would supervise the mixing, and specify the proportions of wine and water - the wilder the party, the less water!

This is probably the origin, long forgotten, of the custom of mixing water with the wine at the Eucharist. Traditionally it symbolises the mingled blood and water, which issued from the crucified Christ when he was pierced by the spear.

Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (m.258 AD) says the mingling symbolises the mystical union between Christ (the wine) and the faithful baptised (the water). (I am indebted to Deacon Dan J. White, of the Church of St Thomas More, Austin, Texas, for drawing this to my attention.)

In view of the strong links between some parts of the Methodist tradition and the Temperance movement, Methodist churches in this country use unfermented grape juice instead of wine at the Eucharist. This has been a Standing Order since the Union of the Methodist Churches in 1932. There is an exception for those Methodist Churches which are part of a Local Ecumenical Partnership, like ours at St Mary's. Such churches are permitted to do what other partner denominations would normally do. For this reason, we both use the same wine for Anglican and Methodist services.