



# The Eucharist

At the heart of our celebration of the Eucharist is the recollection of Jesus' 'Last Supper' with his friends. Though across the centuries a liturgy has built up around this simple event, we too gather around a table (altar) to share bread and wine with our Lord and with each other.

The Eucharist (a Greek word meaning 'thanksgiving') is also known as the Holy Communion, Lord's Supper or Mass. In this service we have the great privilege of receiving the 'body and blood' of our Lord Jesus Christ.

During this final meal with his friends, Jesus took bread, broke it and shared it saying, 'This is my body'. Jesus then passed a cup of wine among the disciples and said, 'This is my blood'. This was to show that the next day his body would be broken and his blood spilt. So as we share bread and wine, we remember Jesus' death on the cross.

Yet, the Eucharist is much more than a commemoration of Jesus' death. For 2000 years Christians have believed that the bread and wine are a special focus for the presence of Christ. As we receive the gifts we meet with our risen Lord, who feeds us and fills us with his new life.

The overall structure of the Eucharist dates from the very earliest days of the Church, so though we have found new ways of expressing our faith, we stand in a tradition of worship that is nearly 2000 years old.

The pattern of the Eucharist briefly is the Preparation, the Ministry of the Word, the Ministry of the Sacrament and the prayers after communion.

In the **Preparation** we make ourselves ready to hear God's Word and to receive our communion.

In **Ministry of the Word** we listen to readings from the Bible and hear the sermon.

In the **Ministry of the Sacrament** we receive the bread and wine, which are tokens of the body and blood of Christ.

The Balance between Word and Sacrament emphasises that Jesus comes to us as we listen to the Bible and as we receive his body and blood.

As many will know, the Eucharist or Mass was originally in Latin or Greek. Latin or Greek titles for elements of our Eucharist have survived to this day. You will see the translation in italics.

## The Preparation

### *'The Peace'*

As the Church family gathers together for worship we greet each other with a handshake. In greeting each other as members of the body of Christ we also recognise the Christ present in each other. Originally this greeting, which is extremely ancient, was a kiss!

### *The Confession*

As we come to God, we ask his forgiveness for our failings. So before the service we should take a moment to consider our lives in the light of Jesus' summary of the commandments:

*'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength and your neighbour as yourself.'*

We believe that God's forgiveness is limitless and that only he can give us a true sense of peace and ease about who we are and what we have done.

### *The Kyrie*

The *Kyrie Eleison* ('Lord have mercy') is an Greek hymn calling upon our Lord Jesus Christ to have mercy on us dating from the Fourth Century AD. It is sung in the penitential seasons of Advent (The four Sundays before Christmas) and Lent (the forty days before Easter).

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The absolution follows our confession. The priest makes the sign of the cross, the sign of God's love and forgiveness.

### **The Gloria**

The *Gloria*, also probably dating from the Fourth Century, is based on the hymn sung by the heavenly choirs at the Saviour's birth; '*Gloria in Excelsis Deo*' - 'glory to God in the highest'. We sing it at the celebratory times of Christmas and Easter and during non-penitential seasons.

The Kyries and Gloria are set to music so at first you may like to listen to them being sung, but we hope you pick up the tunes soon!

### **The Collect**

The collect is meant to do what the name suggests: 'collect up' the prayers of the people. The priest prays with arms outstretched, adopting the attitude of prayer of the first Christians. When the priest sums up or offers the prayers of the people to God in the service s/he does so with outstretched arms.

## **The Ministry of the Word**

### **The Readings**

It is our custom to listen to two readings from Holy Scripture during the service. Our first reading is either from the Old Testament (the Jewish Scriptures) or one of the letters in the New Testament. The Second reading is from one of the four Gospels. We stand to hear the Gospel reading as a sign of our respect for Jesus' words.

The gospel book is brought into the midst of the congregation to symbolise Jesus the Word of God coming to us as we listen to his words.

### **The Sermon**

The preacher, usually one of the staff at St Mary's, seeks to explain the readings or theme for the day. Occasionally the sermon may be on some other relevant subject.

### **The Creed**

The Creed ('*Credo*'- I believe) is a statement of the Christian faith. We use two forms of the creed. The shorter creed is *Apostles Creed* that dates from the Second Century. It stresses the

humanity of Jesus as it was written at a time when this was a matter of great debate within the Church. It derives from the affirmation of faith made by someone seeking to be baptised into the Church.

*The Nicene Creed* was written in the Greek City of Nicea in 359 AD in response to a widespread dispute within the Church. This creed seeks to stress the divinity of Jesus:

*'God from God, Light from Light...'*

It is divided into three sections stating our beliefs about God the Holy Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Trinity, simply put, is the belief that God has revealed himself to us in three ways; as Creator (Father), as a human being (Jesus) and is the Holy Spirit alive in us today.

### **The Intercessions**

These are prayers for the world and the Church led by a member of the congregation. We believe that prayer is a force for good that God has placed in our hands. Prayer is therefore an important Christian responsibility.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

The Intercession is summed up and concluded with the Lord's Prayer, so named as Jesus gave this prayer to his disciples when they asked him to teach them to pray.

'The kingdom' has a dual meaning in Jesus' teaching. It not only refers to the time when the heavenly realm and the created order will be one, but it also most importantly refers to God's influence or 'reign' spreading now in our world—a task God calls us to share in.

We ask God to meet our needs and to forgive our sins. The prayer speaks of 'us' and 'our' not 'me' and 'my', indicating that Jesus intends us to use prayer, for the benefit of others as well as ourselves.

## **The Ministry of the Sacrament**

### **The Offertory**

During the hymn the bread and wine and the collection to support our church are brought to

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the altar. We offer these in thanksgiving to God as signs of all that we are and do.

We thank God for the bread and wine using the Jewish blessing that Jesus himself would have used at the Last Supper.

*'Blessed are you Lord God of all creation...'*

### **The Eucharistic Prayer**

There are several Eucharistic Prayers, which are used in rotation through the liturgical seasons. All modern eucharistic prayers find the origins of their content and structure in a prayer written by St Hippolytus in the early Third Century.

The prayers all begin with the opening greeting between priest and people.

In the opening phrases of the prayers the grace and power of God are recalled in the Creation and in the life of Jesus Christ. The name given to this element of a eucharistic prayer is the **Salvation history**.

Our response to this good news is two short songs of praise.

### **The Sanctus**

*The Sanctus ('holy')* dates from the Fourth Century and is a song, found in the prophet Isaiah chapter 6, sung by the angels declaring the holiness and glory of God.

### **The Benedictus ('blessed')**

As we prepare to welcome Jesus as he comes among us in bread and wine we sing the song that hailed Jesus on his arrival in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday:

*'Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!'* (Mark 11v10)

### **The Prayer of Consecration**

Here we recall the Last Supper - Jesus gathered around a table with his disciples sharing a last meal together (possibly a Passover Meal). Jesus takes bread and wine and tells his confused disciples that these 'elements' represent his body and blood. By breaking the bread and sharing the wine he shows what is to happen to him on the cross the next day. By following Jesus' example we remember his death.

We ask the Holy Spirit to come upon the bread and wine that they may become for us Christ's body and blood. The bread and wine become a special focus for the presence for Jesus. This is a most essential element of any eucharistic prayer. It is called the **'epiclesis'** - *the calling down* of the Holy Spirit upon the gifts.

As the prayer draws to its climax we recall why we may stand with confidence before God to offer our thanksgiving and praise - the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (*the 'anamnesis'*- *the recollection*).

### **The Fraction**

The priest breaks the consecrated bread to remind us Jesus' body was broken on the cross. In our response we affirm our belief that as we share Christ's body we become members of one body - the Church, and as such are part of each other.

### **The Agnus Dei**

The Agnus Dei (*Lamb of God*) is another ancient hymn to Jesus, where he is described as the 'Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world'.

We are taken back to the book of Exodus chronicling the Jews' escape from the hands of Pharaoh. The Jews were told to daub the blood of a lamb on their door posts. This was a sign to the angel of death not to visit their homes, as he passed over Egypt taking the first born to persuade Pharaoh to let God's people go. The Jews celebrate this event at The Passover.

The climax of the annual Passover Celebration at the Temple in Jerusalem witnessed the offering of the blood of a lamb for the sins of the people. Since Jesus was crucified at Passover and as we believe his blood was shed for the forgiveness of the world, he soon came to be known as the Lamb of God.

As the *Agnus Dei* is sung, the presiding priest communicates (gives the bread and wine) to the other ministrants who are either ministers or lay members of the congregation who are licensed to administer the bread and wine by the Bishop.

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### ***Receiving Communion***

If you are confirmed or a member of another Christian denomination and are in good standing with it, you are invited to receive communion. If you intend to receive communion regularly here and are not confirmed please see one of the staff. If you are a member of the Church of England, but unconfirmed, please come to the altar rail for a blessing. We say a short prayer for you. If you wish to be confirmed please see the leaflet about Confirmation on the notice board at the back of church or speak to one of the staff.

### ***During Communion***

Please join in the singing of the hymns or remain silent to offer God your prayers and thanksgiving.

### **After Communion**

The service finishes with thanksgiving prayers and the blessing. In the thanksgiving prayer we are reminded of a theme that runs through Jesus' teaching; that of likening the kingdom of heaven to a banquet. Jesus seeks to give us some idea of the joy and celebration that awaits us.

The final words of the service remind us that we have been fed by Christ in Word and Sacrament for a purpose:

*'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.*