



### THINKING ABOUT THE EUCHARIST (MASS / HOLY COMMUNION)

#### Why do we celebrate the Eucharist?

Eucharist means thanksgiving. On the night before Jesus died, he shared a final meal known as 'Passover' with his disciples. During this he gave us, for all time, this special way of remembering him: as bread is broken and shared and as wine is poured out, he is with us, present. We celebrate the Eucharist because Jesus commands us: *'Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."' (Luke 22:19)*

This is the service Jesus inaugurated and gave to us as a way of experiencing his very presence among us and with us; it is the central act of worship of the Christian Church and the focus for the worshipping life of St Mary's Church, Thorpe.

#### The Passover

The Passover is a special meal when Jews remember and re-enact the night when God set them free from slavery in Egypt. They believe that, in remembering this event in their history, the effects of it – God's salvation – will be made present today. The Children of Israel had been slaves in Egypt for 210 years when God promised he would release them from slavery. Pharaoh refused their release and God had visited ten plagues on Egypt to demonstrate his power. (Exodus 3: 19-20). When they did flee God kept his promise and liberated the people. They had to leave quickly – even their bread hadn't risen! The words used in our communion service are very similar to those found in the Passover remembrance, but they have taken on new significance – the death and resurrection of Jesus.

#### Covenant Relationship with God

The names Old and New Testament (or Covenant) help Christians to understand the old and new relationships with God. In the New Testament or New Covenant, Christians understand that Jesus heralds a new relationship, not based on individual sacrifices for sins but sealed with his very body and blood. This relationship is open to all, not simply one Nation or the Jews of old when the people of Israel were saved. In this 'New Covenant' through Jesus and his sacrifice, all people may be saved – we have a choice to participate in God's saving activity. At the Last Supper, the Gospels records the words of Jesus:

*'Then Jesus took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."' (Mark 14: 23, 24)*

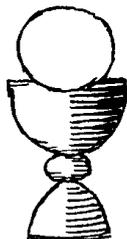
#### The Last Supper

At the last supper, Jesus gives to his disciples a new special meal: one that remembers and makes present the greater and deeper salvation that took place when Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Jesus gives his disciples a way of understanding and remembering his death at the centre of our worship as a sacrifice and an eternal covenant, as we share in Communion together. The Gospels specify that it was the Twelve Disciples who gathered with Jesus at the Last Supper when our Lord commanded them to eat and drink in remembrance of him.

*'While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."' Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.'"' (Matthew 26.26-27)*



Jesus promised to be with his disciples whenever they met in his name. Likewise today he meets us spiritually when we share in Holy Communion. The Eucharist is, therefore, an encounter with the risen Jesus. We not only meet Jesus in one another, because we are all members of his Body, and meet him in the words of Scripture, his living word to us, but also we meet him in the bread and wine, which become to us his body and blood. This meal is for us a participation in Jesus' death and resurrection – just as he told his disciples at the Last Supper.



### **Eucharist / Holy Communion – a Sacramental sign**

A sacrament is a Christian rite, an outward sign of something that God is doing within our hearts and very lives! The Eucharist (like Baptism) is a sacrament: the outward and visible sign is the bread and wine; the inward reality is the living presence of Jesus.

### **Eucharist / Holy Communion - one service with many names**

**Eucharist:** We give thanks for the whole of creation and for everything God has done for us in Christ. The Eucharist is the name for our celebrations of Holy Communion at St Mary's Church and the emphasis is one of great celebration and festivity. One could say, the Eucharist is a serious party! Jesus meets us in broken bread and wine outpoured just as he promised at the last supper and on the road to Emmaus when the disciples recognised him in the broken bread.

*'When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road (to Emmaus), while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how Jesus had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.'* (Luke 24. 30-35)

The Eucharistic Feast (service) is divided into two sections: Word and Sacrament. The Word is about encountering Jesus in the Scriptures (readings from the Bible) and the Sacrament is about encountering Jesus presence with us and among us in bread and wine (Communion). The structure of the Eucharist is:

- ❖ The preparation and gathering including a time of confession/penitence.
- ❖ The **Liturgy of the Word** including Bible readings (always a Gospel reading), a talk or sermon, the Creed and prayers of Intercession and thanksgiving.
- ❖ The **Liturgy of the Sacrament** including the Peace, the offering of gifts (including financial offerings to the church), the Eucharistic Prayer recalling the Last Supper & The Lord's Prayer, then people are invited to receive communion.
- ❖ The service concludes with prayers, notices, a prayer of Blessing and the Dismissal.

The Eucharist is a time in which we offer our gifts of *'fruit of the earth and work of human hands,'* the very best of who we are back to God in celebration and thanksgiving. The Priest uses this prayer in preparation for the celebration of Holy Communion just after the gifts of bread and wine have been presented and placed upon the altar (also known as the Communion Table):

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation: through your goodness we have this bread to set before you, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.

**All Blessed be God for ever.**

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation: through your goodness we have this wine to set before you, fruit of the vine and work of human hands.  
It will become for us the cup of salvation.

All **Blessed be God for ever.**

Sometimes we use this prayer:

As the grain once scattered in the fields and the grapes once dispersed on the hillside are now reunited on this table in bread and wine, so, Lord, may your whole Church soon be gathered together from the corners of the earth into your kingdom.

All **Amen.**

In the Eucharist, the priest breaks the bread after the Lord's Prayer has been said, and uses the following words:

*'We break this bread to share in the body of Christ'. To which we all respond in faith: 'Though we are many, we are one body, because we all share in one bread.'*

In and through the Eucharist we are not only united with Jesus in his death and resurrection, but also with each other, and indeed all faithful people throughout time!

**Communion:** This can be understood as Common-Union, the bringing together of people as we share with God and with each other. The emphasis here is simplicity, community and fellowship. This is the name used in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP).

*The noblest sacrament, consequently, is that wherein his Body is really present. The Eucharist crowns all the other sacraments. St. Thomas Aquinas*

**The Lord's Supper:** Some free church and low church Anglican traditions don't recognise the sacramental nature of communion but rather emphasise the 'remembering' of Jesus words and actions at the last Supper. This reminds us of Christ's passion and death.



**Mass:** predominantly used in the Roman Catholic Church. The word 'Mass' comes from the same Latin word as 'Mission' and it simply means 'Go!' The emphasis is on taking what we have received Sacramentally out into the world. We are physically fed with Jesus body and blood and we take this food, in our bodies, to strengthen us for our spiritual journey of faithfulness.

### **Taking part in worship**

Plan to be at church as often as possible, usually each Sunday but don't fit God into your spare time, rather make the Eucharist a priority. Be in church in good time, ready to take part. Prepare your mind and heart for worship and especially for receiving Holy Communion. Before the service make time to pray, examine yourself and look back over the last week. What do you need to say sorry for at the time of confession? What do you need to give thanks for in the prayers? Who are the people you need to pray for? What help and strength do you or others you care about need?

Expect to meet with God in the service, as God has promised to encounter you as we gather as one family of faith at St Mary's. During the service concentrate on what is going on and try not to be distracted. Anchor your thoughts upon God. Participate – join in as much as you can, with your whole heart. In worship you are not a spectator, and not there to be entertained, but you are a worshipper seeking Jesus to be present with you to challenge and change you. Celebrate – enjoy it! Worship is about enjoying the love of God. After the service, and a time of refreshment, go and live what you have learnt in the Eucharist. Don't let your worship be for Sundays only. Put into practice all you have learned during the week. Remember that if you can't attend on a Sunday there are weekday services also. But at home, worship each day. Give praise to God seven days a week, wherever you are, whatever you are doing. Thank Jesus for every part of your life.