

Week 6 – Discovering Holy Communion

Jesus' Last Supper with the disciples

"On the night before he died he came to supper with his friends and, taking bread, he gave you thanks. He broke it and gave it to them, saying: 'Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.' At the end of supper, taking the cup of wine, he gave you thanks, and said: 'Drink this all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"

The heart of Holy Communion is to do as Jesus asks – to focus on him, dying on a cross, so that we can be forgiven. Jesus invites us to share this special meal with him, and with Christians the world over: it is sometimes described as the Lord's Supper, or coming to the Lord's table.

"The Lord is here. His Spirit is with us."

We experience the real and living presence of Jesus Christ as we share in the prayers, and in receiving the bread and the wine.

"Let us give thanks to the Lord our God."

We thank God for our world, and for the gift of life; for the coming of Jesus, his death and resurrection; for the Holy Spirit, and the promise of eternal life. Holy Communion sums up our response to all that God has done for us: it is also called the Eucharist, which means thanksgiving.

"Do this in remembrance of me."

Holy Communion is a *sacrament* – an ordinary action, which has been given a special meaning by God. As we eat the bread and drink the wine, we re-live the experience of the disciples at their last meal with Jesus. The bread is broken, just as his body was broken on the Cross: the wine is poured out, just as his blood was poured out for our sake. Receiving the sacrament, we receive the life of Christ himself, coming to renew and refresh us in our Christian living.

"Christ has died: Christ is risen: Christ will come again."

- We **look back** to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, which brought forgiveness and hope to all who believe.
- We **look to the present**, knowing that the Spirit of Jesus is alive and with us, today and always.

- We ***look forward*** to the great Christian hope, that one day the whole world will receive Jesus Christ as their Lord, and his justice and love will rule their lives.
"We are one body, because we all share in one bread."

Holy Communion is central to the faith and worship of the whole Christian Church. It unites us with Christians throughout the world, and throughout history. It is a sign that we are all part of that great Christian community – one body, the Body of Christ.

Holy Communion is an experience we *share*. This is why we exchange a sign of peace with one another during the service – a handshake, and "Peace be with you."

"That we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us."

We pray that our old, sinful lives will come to an end, and that we will be raised to a new life with Christ. We want to be able to say, like Paul –

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." (Galations 2: 19-20).

This is the real meaning of eating the bread and drinking the wine; we are asking Jesus to fill our whole life, flesh and blood, heart and soul.

**"The body of Christ. Amen.
The blood of Christ. Amen."**

At the climax of the service, we receive the sacrament, and we know that our prayers have been heard. We become deeply, spiritually, and physically conscious of Jesus actually being alive (incarnate) in our bodies and our minds.

It's impossible to put this experience into words. Holy Communion is one of God's greatest gifts to us, a source of infinite strength and understanding.

"We offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice."

Now it is our turn to give.

To renew our commitment to follow our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

To devote our lives to loving God, and loving other people, as Jesus showed us.

"Go in peace to love and serve the Lord."

At the end of the service we are reminded that Holy Communion was given to us for a purpose – to take what we have received into our everyday lives. It's no use just saying it – we need to go and live it.

It is from the closing words of the service, in the original Latin – "Ite missa est" – that Holy Communion became known as the Mass.