

## What we do at Holy Communion and what it means – a descriptive Mass

All Saints, Woodham is a Church of England church. Our services are traditional, sometimes called ‘high church’ or ‘anglo-catholic’. The style is closer to the Roman Catholic end of the spectrum, we usually call our service of the Holy Communion ‘the Mass’.

The priest (vicar) wears vestments, we use candles, incense, we process, and use traditional language, but the fundamentals of the communion service are the same as a more ‘middle of the road’ or ‘low’ church. At the Sunday service on 3 March 2024 the vicar, Father Roland Olliff did a “descriptive Mass” where he gave short explanations during the service of what we are doing and why we are doing it. I have typed up his explanations from our Facebook recording and I have added illustrative photos from one of our regular services.

The description is from Fr Roland. The text in bold is the name of the part of the service. The text in italics is the first sentence of that part of the service.

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We have an **Opening Hymn**. It should be a glorious hymn. Our choir enters, singing. We stand to sing because we are glorifying God. We process up to the altar, and I kiss the altar, and cense it:



the priest is the alter Christus – Christ at the altar – that’s why I wear vestments, to cover my sins. I reverence the altar. Then we say, *“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”* We make the **Sign of the Cross**, to remind us that we were baptised in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The sign of the cross reminds us that we are one in Christ through our baptism. Then I greet you, *“Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you...”* Our welcome to each other.

We come to the penitential part of our service. We prepare ourselves in our **Prayer of Preparation**, *“Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires know, and from whom no secrets are hidden...”*. We pause before we say our **Confession (Prayers of Penitence)** for a few moments of silence, when in our hearts we should be thinking of how we have failed God during the week. *“Most merciful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we confess that we have sinned in thought, word and deed...”* We know we have a God of love and compassion who forgives us our sins no matter what. The **Kyrie Eleison** *“Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.”* is the great song of the Church to plead for God’s forgiveness for us. Then we hear the words of the **Absolution** *“Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins...”* God

has forgiven us, washed away our sins. Normally we would glorify God by singing the **Gloria**, “*Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth...*” but we are in Lent, we keep ourselves penitential.

The **Collect**, the collective prayer of the people to God before we begin the Ministry of the Word. We hear from the **Old Testament**. Then we meditate on the Word through our **Responsorial Psalm** by singing it together. Then the **New Testament**.

Then we have our **Gradual Hymn**. We stand during the Gradual Hymn for the coming of the Word of God in the Gospels, the Good News in Scripture. Our Gradual Hymn allows us to lift our spirits – we are all standing now, to glorify God - and in our church we process the Gospel, high in the air, proclaiming the Gospel of the Lord.



We have a **Gospel Acclamation**, “*Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to...*” we are telling you this is the Word of God in our Acclamation. Then we cense it.



The priest reads it. We are saying this is a most important part of the Liturgy of the Word, the proclamation of the Gospel.

The **Sermon** is part of the Ministry of the Word. I will begin researching my sermon on Monday. I begin by reading through the Scriptures for that week, and I read them every day. I get my books out and my commentaries. There are wise people who write. You unpack the Gospel. The Sermon should make us think, it should challenge us. My tutor at Mirfield said to me, “if you can’t say it in 10 minutes, don’t say it.” The sermon always leads into the **Creed**. We stand for the Creed because we are glorifying God. The Creed encapsulates everything, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, our central statement of faith.

We sit or kneel for our **Prayers**. If Christ walked into this church now, to take us to the new Jerusalem, we would be lying down in front of Christ the risen Lord. The intercessors are

speaking between us and God. We tend to pray for the Church, then the world, then the parish, then the sick, then the dead. But you can have any kind of intercessions. We offer our own prayers at the same time, because there are people we know who need our prayers who aren't on the church list. Our act of **Peace** "*The peace of the Lord be always with you. And also with you...*" moves us from our Ministry of the Word to our Ministry of the Sacrament.

We have our **Offertory Hymn** where we can make our offerings which are taken to the altar and then blessed. We have prepared our table. We have brought gifts of bread and wine. They are placed on the altar, and I have washed myself clean. We give thanks for the gifts of God. Not only bread and wine, but the gifts within our lives that God grants for us every day. For that we have the **Sursum Corda**, "*...Lift up your hearts. We lift them to the Lord...*". We sing our **Sanctus**, "*Holy, holy, holy Lord. God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest...*", our glory to God, our sacred song of the mysteries.

The **Consecration**, the epiclesis. Wine and bread are blessed, they are made sacred, for us they are the body and blood of Christ, we accept them as a memorial of his death, "*...grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit these gifts of bread and wine may be to us his body and his blood ...*"



We pray the **Lord's Prayer**, the prayer that Jesus taught us, acknowledging his greatness for us in our lives. Then the **Agnus Dei**, "*Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us...*" where we give thanks for what has been consecrated in his name, and that we will share with him from the cross and the risen place within heaven.

The **Fraction**, "*We break this bread to share in the body of Christ. Though we are many, we are one body, because we all share in one bread.*" where I break the body of Christ, as he was broken on the cross for us: and then we combine it:



because we are in one body together as His body.

As the priest, I invite you to come forward to take the body and blood of Christ within you in the **Words of Invitation**, *“Draw near with faith. Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ which he gave for you, and his blood which he shed for you. ...”*.

We as his people can't quite accept that, so the Church has inserted a **Prayer of Humble Access**, our final declaration before we draw to take the body and blood of Christ, *“We do not presume to come to this your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold and great mercies. ...”*

The sacrament is carried high, because it is such a special thing, and then to the words, “the body of Christ” your reply is “Amen”, let it be, and then you take the wine and say “Amen”.

Then our **Post Communion Prayer** of thanks, *“Almighty God, we thank you for feeding us wit the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ. ...”*

We move from the sacredness of the high altar to give our notices.

Then the **Blessing** *“the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among with you and remain with you always.”*



We take that blessing with us into the world. Then we have our final **Hymn**.

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