

## **CORPUS CHRISTI**

If you are new to Church and new to St Mary's, do not use this book on Sundays! If you have worshipped here since time began, do not use this book on Sundays!

There are dozens of copies of 'Common Worship' (which came out at the Millennium) near the hymn books, and in them are a whole range of wonderful resources to discover for lots of different times and seasons. Yes, I have heard whispers that our simple service sheet is not as extensive as it could be and, that it is all new: 'we don't know the responses'! So firstly, dear sisters and brothers, they are not new at all, they are at least 22 years old and you can find them in different sections of this book! What you do have before you is the responses you actually need and yes, the bare minimum, so as to unhook ourselves from following a script, with our heads down, as if we are back at school.

You have not come back to school today but instead you have been invited to share in a special feast. Have you ever been out to a restaurant and seen someone doing this (book) or this (newspaper) or this (mobile phone)? I think it is rude to do that in company, and in a family and public context. We need instead to put all our props down and concentrate on the wonder and attention and hopefully a little mystery needed to worship: with our bodies, hearts and minds, ears and eyes – all our senses in fact, in the same way that we do if we go and see a familiar and well-loved play or, concert, or film. We need our liturgy to come alive by feeling alive and joyful and prayerful and thoughtful; the list of different ways of experiencing and taking part in common worship are indeed many and varied. But we are a parish and people centred on the Eucharist every single week and during the week, too. I shouldn't say 'but' – it is what we intentionally come to celebrate as often as we can - when we gather around the Lord's table for Communion, for fellowship, for simply

being fed and nurtured as Christ encouraged and commanded us to do.

Of course there is a structure to our menu in 'Common Worship' with four constituent parts which make up the whole meal experience. They are always the same even if the words change, the readings change or the hymns and congregational setting change. They are:

1. The Gathering. This is setting the scene if you like, introducing the day, preparing to be in the right frame of mind and hence to begin with our saying sorry to God and one another for our faults and criticizing one another unfairly. Penitential prayers or tears are where we begin if we want God to forgive us and release us into the spirit of true worship and praise which is represented by the Angels' song: 'The Gloria'. In the setting you have been singing for some 15 years or more it begins and repeats 'Glory to God in the Highest many times....you know and love it by heart; when introduced to another setting like today's St Cedd Mass, those words change slightly. If we had our own printing press we could keep on changing the script and the precise wording week on week....but we are not a printing company, we are a worshipping one! My advice is to follow the choir as you already have been taught how each setting goes, just enjoy and relax and go with the flow as if you are singing along to a favourite song at home. I do that in the car a lot, don't you – sing loudly even if you do not remember all the well-known words?

2. The Liturgy of the Word. This is more like school but actually it is about listening to something we have also heard many times before and responding in new and reflective ways. There are variations on The Creed to use, not to upset you, but perhaps instead to help us think through what it is we have learnt by rote or what perhaps has become a little stale. The prayers are very much an offering by different people for the whole people gathered, and using their own

words and themes to help us focus and centre our listening and Christian doing.

3. The Liturgy of the Sacrament. We begin with our sharing the Peace something I do not recommend if you are holding any kind of book or service sheet! Think of that restaurant where you have handed back the menu and you are hands-free once more. Covid hasn't helped our spontaneity; it has made us understandably cautious but all I can say is that this communal action sometimes cynically referred to as 'The Interval' (when the ice creams come round) is actually an important symbol of what I want to say today; it is actually a rehearsal of what it means to be 'corpus Christi' and to put our moans behind us and be reconciled to the God who wants us to both change and grow. Now those of you who want to go back to the script of whether the priest is using Eucharistic Prayer A, B, or Z my advice is the same as our singing the Gloria...having taken part in the offertory and watching the action, carry on watching the making and our praying the Eucharist together: we have incense, we have bells, we have silence as well as words so just relax, please relax with God in order that this Communion is more feast, than fact sheets.

4. The Dismissal. This is the last and shortest part and where comparison with a restaurant meal fails us. This is not when the coffee and chocolate is served; it is instead our desire to re-enact what we have witnessed and said and shared, forwards out there: into our homes and work and community in the coming week. For me this was beautifully summarised many years ago by Fr John Hadley in his wonderful book, 'Bread of the World':

"Like a braided loaf, the Eucharist weaves our life together with the life of Christ and the life of the world, interpreting each in the light of others. We are not just to hear but to **be** the Word of God; we offer not just a distant Jesus, not just an irrelevant wafer, but all humanity

for consecration; we not merely receive but **become** the Body of Christ broken, his Blood poured out, for the world.” AMEN.