In the Sacrament of Baptism we enter a new life in Christ as sons and daughters of God. But baptism is the beginning. Our new life in Christ must be constantly renewed and that is what happens in the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

The earliest reference to the Sacrament of Holy Communion is in Paul’s first letter to the Church in Corinth. He says, ‘For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night that he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me”. In the same way also, the cup, after supper, saying, “This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you; then he added the instruction, “Do this in remembrance of me”.

Our English translations do not convey the full meaning of these last words. A better translation would be, ‘Do this as a recalling of me; do this to share in everything I am and everything I will become’.

But what does that mean?

It’s fairly obvious that the first disciples did not understand what Jesus meant.

In the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-31) we read that they were joined by Jesus but that they failed to recognise him.

They talk together and he draws from them their account of all that had happened during the previous week. They tell him of their disillusionment and their perplexity then he says to them, ‘O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ Then he goes on to unfold the meaning of the scriptures and to explain what has been happening to them.

When they reach their destination he seems to be going further but they urge him to stay with them. ‘When he was at table with them he took the bread and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them’.

Look again at the story. The four actions specified are the four actions specified in every service of Holy Communion. In fact the whole event seems to describe what happens day by day and week by week in Christian churches all over the world.

The service begins with a brief introduction and an act of Confession and Absolution; it ends with a Blessing and Dismissal. Otherwise it is divided into two parts, the Liturgy of the Word which revolves around the reading and explanation of scriptures and the Liturgy of
the Sacrament which involves taking, blessing, breaking and sharing.

Now notice what happened on the road to Emmaus. The two disciples state their perplexity and, in reply, Jesus expounds the scriptures to them. He then goes on to take, bless, break and share and in the sharing their eyes are opened to the presence of Jesus and he vanishes from their sight.

The experience of those two disciples is an experience known to many millions of Christians and it is only after the event that we can say, with them, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?

Whenever we celebrate Holy Communion, we feed on the life of Christ and become participants in the Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

We should approach every Holy Communion with an attitude of expectancy. We should participate as fully as possible in the service and we should expect to meet the Risen Christ.

The Anglican Church has always been reluctant to say exactly how we experience the presence of Jesus in Holy Communion.

We want to avoid the Protestant understanding which says that the Holy Communion is little more than a Memorial Service but we also want to avoid the Roman Catholic explanation which says that the bread and wine becomes the actual body and blood of Jesus.

Perhaps the Anglican position is best summed up in a verse which is attributed to Queen Elizabeth I:

*He was the Word that spake it,*  
*He took the bread and brake it,*  
*And what the Word did make it*  
*I do believe and take it.*

**Titles**

The Sacrament of Holy Communion is called by a number of different names, each of which contributes to our understanding of the sacrament.  

*Holy Communion* speaks of our fellowship with God and with one another.  

*The Lord’s Supper* recalls the meal Jesus shares with his disciples, at all times and in all places.  

*The Eucharist* comes from a Greek word - *eucharistia* - which means ‘thanksgiving’. In this sacrament we thank God for all he has done for us in Jesus Christ.

*The Liturgy* is also derived from the Greek language. It is a compound of the word for people (*laos*) and the word for work (*ergon*) and it means, literally, the work of the people. In Liturgy we offer ourselves, soul and body, to work in God’s service.

*The Mass* is a medieval title for this sacrament, probably deriving from a phrase at the end of the Latin service: 'It is finished'.

**Think about it**

*Was ever another command so obeyed? For century after century, spreading slowly to every continent and country and among every race on earth, this action has been done, in every conceivable human circumstance, for every conceivable human need from infancy and before it to extreme old age and after it, from the pinnacle of earthly greatness to the refuge of fugitives in the caves and dens of the earth. Men have found no better thing than this to do for kings at their crowning and for criminals going to the scaffold; for armies in triumph or for a bride and bridegroom in a little country church; for the proclamation of a dogma or for a good crop of wheat; for the wisdom of the Parliament of a mighty nation or for a sick old woman afraid to die; in thankfulness because my father did not die of pneumonia; for a village headman much tempted to return to fetish because the yams had failed; because the Turk was at the gates of Vienna; for Captain so-and-so wounded and prisoner of war; while the lions roared in the nearby amphitheatre; on the beach at Dunkirk; while the hiss of scythes in the thick June grass came faintly through the windows of the church; tremulously, by an old monk on the fiftieth anniversary of his vows; furtively, by an exiled bishop who had hewn timber all day in a prison camp near Murmansk; gorgeously, for the canonisation of S. Joan of Arc— one could fill many pages with the reasons why men have done this, and not tell a hundredth part of them.

And best of all, week by week and month by month, on a hundred thousand successive Sundays, faithfully, unfailingly, across all the parishes of Christendom, the pastors have done this just to make the plebs sancta Dei— the holy common people of God.*

- Dom Gregory Dix