

there is no God but ours. Often people ask why we use the word “catholic” in the creed. *Catholic* does not mean we are part of the Roman Catholic Church. Rather *catholic* means we are part of the “universal” church, the body of Christ’s baptized and faithful people throughout space and time.

**The Prayers of the People & Confession of Sin:** The deacon, lay minister, or priest invites us to prayer. The congregation joins the petitions verbally or silently. As a kingdom of priests, we intercede for the church, the world, and those in need. The Prayer Book offers a number of different sets of prayers, beginning on page 383. If the confession of sin was not offered earlier in the service, it concludes the prayers of the people.

**The Peace:** The Celebrant then pronounces the Lord’s peace to the people, and they respond to him in peace. The Peace is not merely a chance to say hello to friends we have not seen in a week. The liturgy reminds us that to come to the Table, we must be in right fellowship with others. What we enact in the peace, assumes a reality in our lives: that nothing divides us from others in the church as we come to receive the body and blood of Christ.

### *The Holy Communion*

**The Offertory:** The second part of the liturgy begins with the collection of our tithes and offerings to the Lord. This flows with the overall movement of the Holy Communion liturgy, in which we give thanks to God for his goodness to us. The offertory is the gift of our first-fruits back to the Giver of all things. The congregation stands and sings the Doxology to conclude the offertory.

**The Great Thanksgiving:** Now we come to the communion prayer, which contains several parts. First, the Celebrant (a priest or the bishop when he visits) begins with an antiphonal greeting inviting the congregation to lift their hearts in thanksgiving. Second, the Celebrant offers the Preface to the communion prayer, which either expresses the theme of the church year or praises the Trinity.

The Preface flows into singing two Biblical hymns as one song. The first hymn, the Sanctus (Latin for “holy”), is the song of the angelic beings in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. The second hymn, the Benedictus (Latin for “blessed”), is the song of Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. When we sing these Scriptural songs, we join the choirs of heaven praising God before his throne. We entreat the Lord Jesus to join us at the Altar by the Holy Spirit. Even more, we cry out for Jesus to return in power and glory for the great wedding feast of the Lamb (Rev. 19).

After the song, the congregation kneels or stands, while the Celebrant offers to the Father the Prayer of Consecration. This Prayer proclaims the gospel, recalls Jesus’ words of institution at the Passover and invokes the Holy Spirit to consecrate the bread and wine as the spiritual body and blood of Jesus and to consecrate us to receive it properly.

Throughout the Great Thanksgiving, the Celebrant lifts his hands, an ancient, biblical posture for prayer, and makes the sign of the cross over the elements, symbolizing their consecration as the body and blood of Jesus. At the conclusion of the Prayer of Consecration, the congregation stands and recites the Lord’s Prayer. Praying the Lord’s Prayer reminds us that its petitions are met in the grace of God which we receive at the table, and that the Lord’s Supper is our foretaste of his kingdom coming in its fullness.

**The Breaking of the Bread & Communion:** Then, in silence, the Celebrant breaks the consecrated bread and invites the people to receive. As Christ was broken on the cross for our sins, so by the bread our union with him is assured and strengthened. We are in Christ, and Christ is in us. As Christ’s blood was poured out on the cross, the wine assures us that our sins are forgiven, that his grace is sufficient, and that one day we will drink the fruits of the new creation.

Some members of the church will make the sign of the cross before and after receiving communion to remind them that only through Jesus may we have intimacy with God and that their lives are committed to the way of the cross. Of course, communion is a time of celebration. As Jesus feeds us with grace by the Spirit, so the worship team leads in singing God’s praises, again. Once everyone has communed with the Lord, the Celebrant and congregation offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the Lord’s Supper and ask God to empower us to live lives worthy of him in the world.

**Benediction & Dismissal:** Then the priest (or the bishop when present) pronounces the Triune God’s blessing over his beloved people. Many in the congregation make the sign of the cross as they receive the benediction. As the liturgy concludes, we are sent out into the world on Christ’s mission by the power of the Spirit. On occasion, we begin the dismissal with the Zimbabwe Covenant or the Kenyan Litany, not only participating in the truth of those words, but truly identifying with the global Church.

The ministers of the service then process out, symbolizing our return journey into the world on Christ’s behalf. And lastly, the deacon (if present) dismisses us with thanksgiving, a fitting end to The Holy Eucharist.

### *For Further Information*

If you have further questions about the liturgy at All Saints, or the Church Year, feel free to contact Rev. Nowell Copley at [ncopley@visitallsaints.org](mailto:ncopley@visitallsaints.org). You may also find Thomas Howard’s booklet, *The Liturgy Explained*, helpful. For in depth study, see Simon Chan’s, *Liturgical Theology*, and Jeffrey Meyers’, *The Lord’s Service*. Robert Webber’s book, *Ancient Future Time: Forming Spirituality Through the Church Year*, is an excellent resource for exploring the seasons of the church calendar.



## **What is Liturgy?** *An Explanation of the Sunday Service*



401 E. Kennedy St, B7  
Spartanburg, SC 29302

864-285-4121  
[info@visitallsaints.org](mailto:info@visitallsaints.org)  
[www.visitallsaints.org](http://www.visitallsaints.org)

Rev. 7/2/18



One of the first things people notice about All Saints is the way we worship. That observation often prompts the inquiry, “Why do we do that?” This article will help you understand the meaning behind the things we say and do, whether you are a newcomer asking these questions for the first time, or a long-standing member in need of a refresher. May the information offered in this article more fully prepare you to worship the Triune God in spirit and truth, with reverence and awe.

## Ancient & Future

The first thing to note about All Saints’ worship is that the liturgy is ancient and future. In the Old Testament, the people of God gathered three times a year to commemorate their redemption from Egypt and to Celebrate God’s goodness in creation (Lev. 23). At these sacred times, the Israelites moved through a somewhat regular pattern of worship (See Exo. 19-24; Lev. 1-9; Josh. 8:30-35; 2 Chron. 5-7 and 29-31). First, they were called to assemble. Second, there was a form of purification, usually a sin offering. Third, they often heard God’s mighty saving deeds recounted or listened to instruction from God’s Law. Fourth, they demonstrated their devotion to God through burnt and grain offerings. Fifth, they communed with God through fellowship offerings. Last, blessing was pronounced over them.

Following Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, the first Christians insisted that Jesus’ death was the final sin offering (Heb. 7:26-8:2), leaving no room for the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Rather, they gathered on Sundays to celebrate Jesus’ victory over sin and death. At the same time, the early church recognized that the worship of the ancient Israelites followed the pattern and movement of worship in heaven and that new covenant worship on earth joined the worship of heaven (Exo. 25:40; Heb. 8:5; 12:22-24; Rev. 4:1-5:14). They saw Sunday corporate worship as an intersection between heaven and earth, and an anticipation of the wedding supper of the Lamb at the return of Christ (Rev. 19). Thus, early Christian worship on the Lord’s Day included confession of sin, hearing the Word of God, prayer, offering gifts to the Lord, and communing with Christ in the Lord’s Supper.

Within a few centuries, the early Christians began to commemorate certain days on which God’s great saving acts had occurred. Special worship services developed for these holy days (holidays), like Christmas and Easter. As the Christian calendar developed, the holy days and times were grouped into two cycles each year: The Season of Light and The Season of Life. The Season of Light begins in the darkest time of the year (when the days are short) with Advent, a period of solemn preparation before celebrating the birth of Jesus on Christmas. The Season of Light continues for twelve days after Christmas until Epiphany (the day of the wise men) when we commemorate the leaders of the nations coming to worship Jesus and the light of the Gospel breaking into the world.

The Season of Life begins in the dormant time of the year (just before spring) with Lent, a forty-day period of solemn preparation before celebrating the resurrection of Jesus on Easter. The Season of Life continues for fifty days after Easter until Pentecost, when we commemorate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the new life of the Gospel advancing into the world. Thus, both of these seasons begin with a time of solemn reflection, move into a commemoration of God’s rescue of the world through Jesus and climax with a celebration of God’s salvation going out into the world until Jesus comes again.

The calendar and liturgy at All Saints is therefore both ancient and future; grounded in the worship modeled in Scripture; patterned after the worship of the early Church; joined to the worship in heaven; and anticipating the worship of the new creation at Christ’s glorious return.

## Ritual & Ceremony

“Liturgy” literally means “the work of the people,” and this partly explains why the

whole congregation participates in various aspects of the service, both by word and action, by ritual and ceremony. When important events occur in life, we commemorate them with ritual and ceremony. For example, we celebrate birthdays with cakes, candles, singing and presents. Almost all special events involve a meal together, whether the rehearsal dinner of a wedding or a covered dish supper following a funeral.

Sometimes people question liturgy because it may seem inauthentic. But this is not the case for many Christians. Liturgy enriches worship by involving the whole person: seeing lighted candles and uplifted cross; confessing our sins and our faith; hearing God’s Word; standing in worship; lifting our hands in praise and need; kneeling in prayer; embracing at the peace; tasting the bread and wine. Since biblical worship is liturgical, involving ritual and ceremony, and since God’s people are a kingdom of priests, the restored temple (Exo. 4:22-23; 19:3-6; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-6; Rev. 1:4-6; 5:10), worship through word and action is the priestly service of all God’s people with all of our selves, body and soul.

## Word & Sacrament

The Book of Common Prayer (1979) calls the Sunday service “The Holy Eucharist: The Liturgy for the Proclamation of the Word of God and the Celebration of Holy Communion.” There are three things to note about this title. The service is called a “Eucharist,” a Greek word meaning “thanksgiving.” In the service, we give thanks to God for his saving work through Jesus by the Spirit. Second, the service is a liturgy. The words and actions of the service are found on pages 351-356 of the Prayer Book. Third, most people are familiar with sermons from the Bible, but for some folks, a “sacrament” is a new notion. In short, Christ gave us the sacraments of baptism and communion as outward signs and seals of inward spiritual grace and as the way we receive his grace. Through the bread and the wine and by the Spirit, our faith, hope and love are empowered. With this in mind, let’s take a closer look at the two parts of the Holy Eucharist to answer further the question, “Why do we do that?”

## The Word of God

**Procession:** Before the liturgy proper begins, the various ministers of the service process in while the congregation sings a hymn. The procession enacts the spiritual reality that in our worship we join the procession of angels and saints into God’s temple. The church on earth, together with the church in heaven, enters God’s presence. This explains why the cross leads the procession. Only by the cross of Jesus may we leave the world behind and enter God’s holy dwelling.

In many services, acolytes carry torches behind the cross to light our way to heaven above. To further picture the heavenly reality of our worship, the various ministers wear white robes (called albs), representing the radiant garments of the heavenly congregation and reminding us that only those declared righteous by faith in Jesus may stand before the throne. The clergy wear collars symbolizing their roles as servants of Christ and his people and stoles (a colored piece of fabric draped around the neck for priests and shoulder for deacons) symbolizing the season of the church year.

**Opening Acclamation:** The leader of the service, usually a priest (called the Celebrant in the Prayer Book), begins the liturgy with an acclamation of praise to which the congregation responds. In this brief verse and response are the heart of worship: blessing God for who he is and what he does.

**Collect of Purity or Confession of Sin:** At the outset of the service, we ask God to purify us to worship him rightly. This is done in one of two ways. In two seasons of the church year, the corporate confession of sin is offered, and the Celebrant pronounces God’s absolution.

We confess the truth: we have broken God’s law and only he can forgive us. The Celebrant announces God’s pardon as the Lord’s voice to the people. In the other seasons of the church year, the congregation prays the Collect of Purity. A collect is a short prayer, usually one sentence that makes a request of God, in this case, for God to cleanse us to magnify his holy name.

**Worship in Song:** Having been assured of God’s mercy and the Spirit’s grace, we lift our voices to adore our Lord. In the Prayer Book, an ancient hymn of pure worship, called the Gloria (Latin for “glory”), is sung. However, at All Saints, we normally replace the Gloria with several songs of praise and worship, but the point remains the same. Many members of All Saints sing with great freedom, lifting their hands. Not only are these actions biblical, they are also appropriate given the worthiness of our God.

**Collect of the Day:** At the end of the worship set, the Celebrant invites the congregation to prayer, using a greeting and response.

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.  
People: And also with you.

In this greeting, we confess that the great hope of every Christian is indeed true: God makes his home with us. Then the Celebrant offers the Collect of the Day, a brief prayer that emphasizes the theme for that season of the church year. The Collect of the Day along with the Scripture readings and the Preface at the Eucharistic Prayer (see below) are called “The Proper.” The Collects may be found beginning on page 211 of the Prayer Book.

**The Scripture Readings:** At this point in the liturgy, we are seated and placed under the authority of God’s word, captured in the response to the Old and New Testament lessons each Sunday.

Reader: The Word of the Lord.  
People: Thanks be to God.

God speaks to us through Scripture, and we are bound to obey gratefully. In between the Old and New Testament lessons a psalm is read, often responsively. The Psalms are the Bible’s prayer book and an anatomy of the redeemed soul. The final lesson each Sunday is from the Gospels. The deacon (if present) reads the Gospel lesson from the midst of the congregation to symbolize the incarnation of Jesus: the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. When the deacon announces the Gospel reading, some members of the church make a three-fold sign of the cross on their forehead, mouth and chest to remind them that the word of Christ must be on their minds, lips and hearts. The Scripture readings are normally taken from the Revised Common Lectionary and follow the story of the church year.

**The Sermon:** Following the reading of Scripture, God’s Word is proclaimed by a priest or some other person authorized to preach. Limiting the preaching role to certain people safeguards the church from false teaching. There is, first of all, a proclamation of the Gospel and secondly, and exhortation or application of the Scriptures to the church. Therefore, the sermon prepares us for Communion: thankful for God’s work and trusting his grace for obedience.

**The Creed:** After hearing God’s Word proclaimed, we stand and profess the faith of the church in the words of the Nicene Creed. The creed dates from the 4th century AD when bishops and theologians gathered in council at the cities of Nicaea and Constantinople to address various heresies.

The Nicene Creed is affirmed by all Christians as a summary of the Trinitarian faith. In confessing it, we affirm the faith and profess in the heavenly realms that