

The Liturgical Calendar

Rites

There are a number of distinct Rites within the Catholic Church. These Rites developed their own liturgies, illustrating the ability of the Church to guard the essential elements of liturgy while accommodating her public worship in non-essentials to circumstances of time, place, and peoples. These Rites are: the Antiochene Rite (Malankar, Maronite, Syrian), the Alexandrian Rite (Coptic, Ethiopian), the Armenian Rite (Armenian), the Byzantine Rite (Albanian, Belarussian, Bulgarian, Croatian, Greek, Hungarian, Slovak, Ukrainian), the Chaldean rite (Chaldean, Syro-Malabar) and the Roman Rite.

Liturgical Year

The Liturgical Calendar begins every year during the month of November on the First Sunday of **Advent** and runs through to the **Solemnity of Christ the King**.

The liturgical year is the temporal structure within which we as the Church celebrate the holy mysteries of Christ: From the **Incarnation** and the **Nativity** to the **Ascension**, to **Pentecost** and to the wait in joyful hope for the Lord's coming.

The Liturgical Calendar is a tool that enkindles the hearts of Catholics so that we will remember and enter into God's plan of salvation that was accomplished through the birth, life, death and rising of Christ -- Who once again walks the earth in our time and presence.

Lectionary

The Lectionary is the Mass readings from the Holy Scripture, and follows a Sunday cycle and a weekday cycle. The Liturgical Calendar follows a three year cycle, each year being represented by the letters, A, B and C.

During the year A cycle, the Gospel of Matthew is the primary Gospel that is used for the readings. In year B, Mark is the primary Gospel. In year C Luke is the primary Gospel. The Gospel of John is proclaimed on particular Sundays in each of the years.

On weekdays in Ordinary Time, there is a 2 year cycle numbered I and II. Year I is read in odd number years such as 2009, 2011, 2013. Year II is read in even years such as 2010, 2012, 2014.

Liturgical Seasons

In each cycle of the Liturgical Calendar, we celebrate six Seasons:

(1) Advent, (2) Christmas, (3) Lent, (4) Triduum, (5) Easter, and (6) Ordinary Time.

During the year, in addition to the Sunday worship, we also celebrate **Solemnities, Feasts, and Memorials** which may be on any day of the week. These occur during the year to commemorate special events or persons in salvation history that are highly revered by the Catholic Church.

The entire Church is required to follow the approved **Universal Liturgical Calendar** as originated from the Congregation of the Liturgy at the Vatican. It contains monthly guides that must be followed by all the faithful.

Some celebrations are celebrated over an entire **region** such as the celebration of the six patrons of Europe who are celebrated as Feasts within Europe. These celebrations, included in the Liturgical Calendar of certain countries, are over and above the mandatory observance of the Universal Liturgical Calendar.

Each **country** is permitted to have a **National Liturgical Calendar** that commemorates the Saints of national importance. These special celebrations are over and above those of Universal and Regional importance.

Further, each **diocese** is permitted to have its own Liturgical Calendar to commemorate the diocesan patron(s) and Saints who are of important to the life of the diocese. These special celebrations are over and above the mandatory Universal, Regional and National celebrations. Dioceses are not required to commemorate the celebrations of other Dioceses unless such celebrations are a part of their own calendars.

Individual **religious Orders** can have their own Liturgical Calendar to commemorate the founder(s) and Saints of their Orders. When a parish/Church belongs to a religious Order, this calendar is observed. The observance of religious Orders is over and above the previously mentioned Liturgical Calendars that are obligatory.

Every parish is encouraged to celebrate the formal Feast (Solemnity) of its Patron and the anniversary date of the dedication of the Church/parish. For example, if a Church was dedicated to Saint Peter on September 1st fifty years ago, and St. Peter's Feast is celebrated on June 29th every year, then the Parish is required to commemorate Saint Peter on June 29th and September 1st of each year.

Parishes dedicated to Our Lady, those holding a Marian title such as Our Lady of Peace, where such a title is not in the Liturgical Calendar, can celebrate their Marian Feast on August 15th or on the date of another Marian Feast that more closely resembles the particular title of Our Lady for that particular Church.

The following is a quick look at our Liturgical year:

Advent (4 weeks of preparation for Christmas)

Christmas (Incarnation of Christ; Son of God and Son of Mary)
Holy Family
Mary the Mother of God (New Year's Day)
Epiphany
Baptism of the Lord

Ordinary Time I

Lent: 40 days (excluding Sundays) beginning Ash Wednesday and concludes with Mass on Holy Thursday

Passion (Palm) Sunday
Easter Sacred Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday)
Easter Vigil (The Resurrection)
Easter (Celebrate the Resurrection at Masses - The greatest Feast of the year.)
Second to Sixth Sundays of Easter (Note: **2nd Sunday of Easter is Divine Mercy Sunday**)

Ascension

Pentecost

Ordinary Time II

Trinity Sunday
Body and Blood of Christ

Ordinary Time II (continued...)

Solemnity of Christ the King (concludes the Liturgical Year)

Advent is the Season that includes four Sundays preceding Christmas. The Advent Season marks the beginning of the Liturgical Calendar. It always begins in late November or early December. On November 30th or on the Sunday that is the closest to this date, the Catholic Church begins the Liturgical Season of Advent. Advent ends on December 24th before the evening prayer of Christmas.

Christmas is the season when Catholics and other Christian Churches give thanks to God the Father for the Incarnation of His Son, Jesus Christ. This Season lasts 12 days, beginning on Christmas Eve (December 24th) and continues to the Feast of Epiphany (January 6th).

The word 'Christmas' comes from '*Christes Maesse*,' which means 'Christ's Mass.' This is the Old English name for the service of Holy Communion that commemorates the birth of Christ.

Christmas is one of the three great Feasts that are celebrated by the Catholic Church. The other two are **Easter** and **Pentecost**.

The **Feast of the Holy Family** of Jesus, Mary and Joseph (Sunday in the Christmas octave) is a festive occasion particularly suitable for the celebration of rites or moments of prayer proper to the Christian family. The recollection of Joseph, Mary and Jesus' going up to Jerusalem, together with other observant Jewish families, for the celebration of the Passover (Lk. 2:41,42), affords an opportunity for the renewal of our entrustment to the patronage of the Holy Family of Nazareth. It may include the blessing of children as provided in the ritual; the renewal of marriage vows taken by the spouses on their wedding day; and also for the exchange of promises between those engaged to be married in which they formalize their desire to found a new Christian family.

On New Year's Day, the octave day of Christmas, the Church celebrates the **Solemnity of the Holy Mother of God**. The divine and virginal motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a singular salvific event: for Our Lady it was the foretaste and cause of her extraordinary glory; for us it is a source of grace and salvation because 'through her we have received the Author of life.'

Beginning with the **Epiphany** (Sunday) of our Lord and the Sundays that follow, Christ's manifestation of Himself to the world is traced through His public ministry and miracles. The Epiphany Season celebrates the many ways that Christ made Himself known to the world. The **Feast of the Epiphany of our Lord** places emphasis on three events: the visit of the Magi (Mt. 2:1-12), the baptism of Jesus (Mk. 1:9-11), and the miracle at Cana (Jn. 2:1-11). Typically, emphasis is placed on the visit of the Magi (the three wise men) on **Epiphany Day**. The **Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord** is commemorated on the First Sunday that follows.

The **Epiphany of our Lord** is observed on January 6th. Some countries have moved the Feast of the Epiphany of our Lord to the nearest Sunday, calling that day 'Epiphany Sunday.' The word 'Epiphany' originates from the Greek word *epiphainen* which means 'to manifest' or 'to make known.' *The Epiphany Season lasts until the beginning of Lent. It includes four to nine Sunday, depending on the date of Easter Sunday.* Closely connected with the salvific events of the Epiphany are the mysteries of the Baptism of the Lord and the manifestation of his glory at the marriage Feast of Cana. The Christmas season closes with the Baptism of the Lord.

Ordinary Time I begins with the Monday that immediately follows the Baptism of the Lord. It ends on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. During this part of the Liturgical Calendar, all the Sundays are numbered consecutively. (Ordinals: count 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc.) During this time frame, the Liturgy of the word (Church readings) is devoted to the mysteries surrounding the life of Christ.

Ash Wednesday is the first day of **Lent**. It is a day of repentance and self-examination. It reaches its peak in Holy Week, the commemoration and entering into of our Lord's Passion and Death.

In the Roman Rite, the beginning of the forty days of penance is marked with the austere

symbol of ashes which are used in the Liturgy of Ash Wednesday. The act of putting on ashes symbolizes fragility and mortality, and the need to be redeemed by the mercy of God. Far from being a merely external act, the Church has retained the use of ashes to symbolize that attitude of internal penance to which all the baptized are called during Lent. The sacramental ashes are made from burned palms that were distributed during the previous year on Palm Sunday. The sacramental ashes remind us that we are dust and unto dust we shall return. A symbol of penance made sacramental by the blessing of the Church, the ashes help us to develop a spirit of humility and sacrifice.

Those who are physically healthy are called to abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday and on all the Fridays during Lent. Fasting consists of one full meatless meal and other limited meatless meals as required to maintain strength. The sick, the young, the elderly are not required to fast. This sacrificial fasting and abstinence should be done with the goal of spiritual development and conversion. [Note: Outside of Lent, fasting on Fridays is still encouraged although many fast from things other than meat.]

Lent precedes and prepares for Easter. It is a time to hear the Word of God, to convert, to prepare for and remember Baptism, to be reconciled with God and one's neighbor, and of more frequent recourse to the 'arms of Christian penance': prayer, fasting and good works (Mt. 6:1-18).

Because the Season of Lent is a time of penitence, reflection and prayer that is solemn and restrained, flowers are generally removed from the sanctuary. Songs of praise such as the 'Gloria in Excelsis' and the 'Alleluias' are removed from the Rites.

During **Holy Week** -- the holiest time of the liturgical year -- we gather to relive the final week of our Lord's life. Holy Week begins with Palm (Passion) Sunday, which unites the royal splendor of Christ with the proclamation of his Passion. The procession -- commemorating Christ's messianic entry into Jerusalem -- is joyous. We usually keep palm or olive branches -- or other greenery which have been blessed on Palm Sunday -- in our homes or in our work places. Palms and olive branches are kept as a witness to faith in Jesus Christ, the messianic King, and in his Paschal Victory.

Triduum is Latin for 'Great Three Days.' The **Easter Triduum**, of 3 days duration, recalls the events of the First Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday. Every year, the Church celebrates the great mysteries of the redemption of mankind in the most **Sacred Triduum** of the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Our Lord. The **Sacred Triduum** extends from the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday evening to first Vespers on Easter Sunday and is celebrated in intimate communion with Christ her Spouse.

Good Friday is the second day of the **Sacred Triduum**. It is the solemn remembrance of the death of Jesus on the Holy Cross. 'Good Friday' was formerly known as 'God's Friday.' In time, the name was corrupted and came to be known as 'Good Friday.'

The Church celebrates the redemptive death of Christ on Good Friday. The Church meditates on the Lord's Passion in the afternoon liturgical action, in which she prays for the salvation of the world, adores the Cross, and commemorates her very origin in the sacred wound in Christ's side (Jn. 19, 34).

In addition to the various forms of popular piety on Good Friday (such as the Via Crucis), the Passion processions are undoubtedly the most important. These correspond, after the fashion of popular piety, to the small procession of friends and disciples who -- having taken the body of Jesus down from the Cross -- carried it to the place where there 'was a tomb hewn in the rock in which no one had yet been buried' (Lk. 23:53). The procession of the 'dead Christ' is usually conducted in austere silence, prayer, and the participation of many of the faithful, who ponder the significance and depths of the Lord's burial.

On Holy Saturday, the Church pauses at the Lord's tomb, meditating on his Passion and Death, his descent into Hell, and -- with prayer and fasting -- awaits his Resurrection. From antiquity, Holy Saturday, the third and last day of the **Triduum** has been known as the *Great Vigil*.

Easter is the *greatest Feast* of the liturgical year, the climax and center of the Catholic Liturgical Calendar. It celebrates the glorious Resurrection of the Lord Jesus at the Masses. Easter Sunday -- the greatest **solemnity** in the liturgical year -- is often associated with many displays of popular piety which proclaim the new and glorious condition of the risen Christ, and the divine power released from his triumph over sin and death.

The day of **Easter** -- which varies from year to year -- is celebrated on the Sunday that follows the first full moon after the vernal equinox; the day in Spring when there is a 12-hour day and a 12-hour night (March 20). Easter can be as early as March 22nd and as late as April 25th.

The **Easter Season** begins with the celebration of the **Easter Vigil** on Easter Sunday and ends 50 days later with **Pentecost** Sunday. The fifty days from Easter Sunday to Pentecost are celebrated in joyful exultation as one Feast day -- or better -- as one 'great Sunday.' During this season -- above all others -- it is a time to sing the 'Alleluia.'

The **Ascension** (which falls on a Thursday) is usually celebrated on the 7th Sunday after Easter. It focuses on the entry of Jesus' humanity into Divine glory in God's heavenly Kingdom, 40 days after His Glorious **Resurrection**.

The **Easter Season** concludes with **Pentecost** Sunday -- the fiftieth day -- and its commemoration of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles (Acts 2:1-4), the Church's foundation, and the beginning of its mission to all nations and peoples. The protracted celebration of the vigil Mass has a particular importance in cathedrals and some parishes, since it reflects the intense persevering prayer of the Christian community in imitation of the Apostles united in prayer with the Mother of Jesus.

The mystery of **Pentecost** exhorts us to prayer, commitment to mission, and fulfilling our

Baptismal promises. It also enlightens popular piety which is a continuing sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church. He arouses faith, hope and charity in the hearts of the faithful as well as those ecclesial virtues which make popular piety valuable. The same Spirit ennoble the numerous and varied ways of transmitting the Christian message according to the culture and customs of all times and places.

Beginning on the Monday following Pentecost Sunday (mid-May to mid-June) until the Saturday before the 1st Sunday of Advent, **Ordinary Time II** is celebrated. The Sundays of this season do not celebrate any specific aspect of the mystery of Christ. Instead they are devoted to the mystery of Christ in all its aspects.

On the First Sunday following Pentecost Sunday, the Church celebrates the **Feast of the Holy Trinity**. On this Sunday, the Church rejoices in the revealed truth that God is triune, three-in-one, in the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Spirit.

The **Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ** is observed on the Thursday following the solemnity of the Most Blessed Trinity (but can be moved to Sunday), and calls us to enter more deeply into the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

The months during **Ordinary Time II** are a time of growth for its members as the Church meditates on the Holy Scripture's teachings as they apply to the daily life of each and all of us.

The **Solemnity of Christ the King** commemorates the closing of the liturgical year. It reminds us that over and above being the universal King, Christ is the Head of His Body -- the Church. His Divine reign stretches out from the alpha of time to the omega.

Other Mandatory Feasts

Throughout the liturgical year, the Catholic Church honors certain Feasts of Mary and the Saints. During these special Feasts, we are called to remember the lives of the Saints and to ask them to pray for us. While most days of obligation fall on a Sunday, there are special Feasts in the Liturgical Calendar that fall during the week.

The number of days of obligation vary from country to country. In the United States, the following 6 days of obligation are observed: the Immaculate Conception (December 8); Christmas Day (December 25); Mary, the Mother of God (January 1); the Ascension (7th Sunday of Easter); the Assumption of Mary (August 15); and All Saint's Day (November 1).

Special Celebrations: Solemnities, Feasts, Memorials

Solemnities are the days of greatest importance and begin with the first vespers of the preceding day. (Vespers are the evening prayers.) Easter Sunday is the greatest of all Solemnities.

Feasts are celebrated within the limits of a natural day. They do not have first vespers, except Feasts of the Lord which fall on Sundays during Ordinary time, or during the Christmas Season.

Memorials may be obligatory or optional and are of lower priority than Solemnities and Feasts.

Liturgical Colors

During the liturgy, the colors in which the priest is dressed and the color in which the Church is decorated varies depending on the Seasons, the Feast, funerals, etc. The Catholic Church uses the following guideline regarding what color should be used:

White *represents purity and joy.* It is used in the seasons of Easter and of Christmas; during the celebrations of Our Lord (except His Passion), Feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, of the Holy Angels, and of Saints who were not martyred, on the solemnities of Trinity Sunday, All Saints (1 November), the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist (24 June), the Feasts of Saint John the Evangelist (27 December), the Chair of Saint Peter (22 February), and the Conversion of Saint Paul (25 January). In some countries, it may be used for Funerals.

Red *represents charity.* It is used on Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion, Good Friday, on Pentecost Sunday, on celebrations of the Lord's Passion, on 'birthday' Feasts of the Apostles and Evangelists, and on celebrations of martyred Saints.

Green *represents hope.* It is used in Ordinary Time.

Violet *represents charity, expectation, purification, or penance.* It is used in the seasons of Advent and of Lent. It may also be worn for Funerals.

Rose: is used on the 3rd Sunday of Advent and the 4th Sunday of Lent (optional).

Black: is used for Funerals (optional), Masses for the Dead and All Souls' Day (optional).

Weddings, Funerals

As a general rule, Weddings and Funerals can take place throughout the liturgical year. Weddings are discouraged but permissible during Lent (from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday). Weddings may not be celebrated during the Holy Week, that is the week before Easter Sunday. Funerals may not be celebrated during the Easter Triduum. Also, funerals may not be celebrated before or during Christmas and New Year when these fall on a weekday.