

Companion to the Calendar

Second Edition

A Guide to the Saints, Seasons, and Holidays of the Year

Kathy Coffey
Donna M. Crilly
Mary G. Fox
Mary Ellen Hynes
Julie M. Krakora
Corinna Laughlin
Robert C. Rabe



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Very Reverend Daniel A. Smilanic, JCD
Vicar for Canonical Services
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Reverend John F. Canary, STL, DMIN
Vicar General
Archdiocese of Chicago
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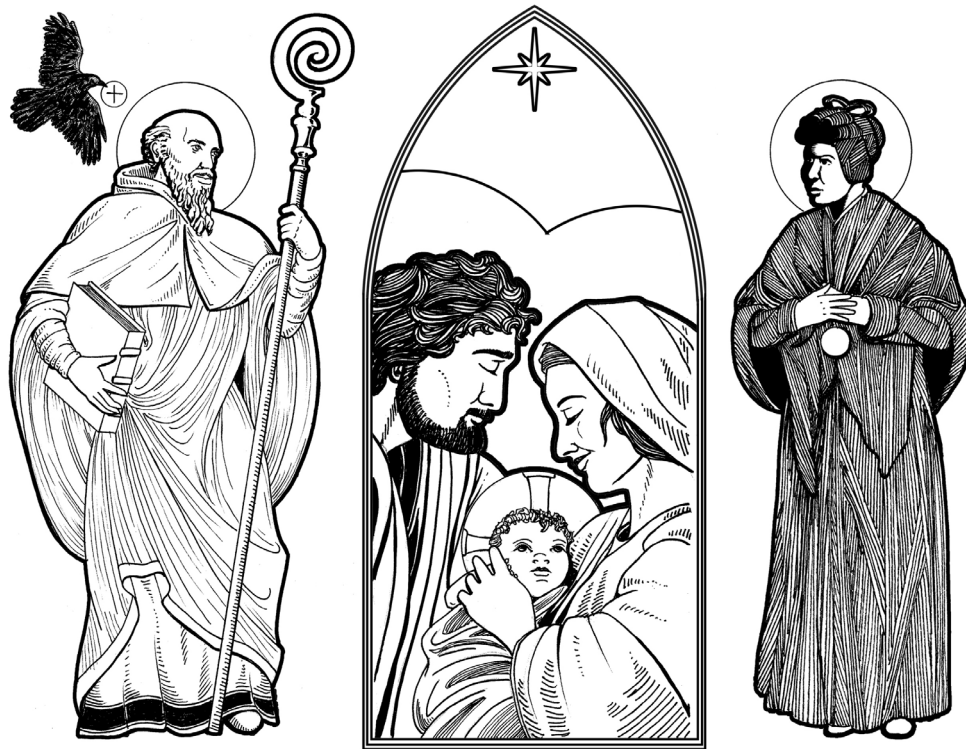
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INTRODUCTION

Christ yesterday and today
the Beginning and the End
the Alpha
and the Omega
All time belongs to him
and all the ages
To him be glory and power
through every age and for ever. Amen.

Each year, at the Easter Vigil, these words are prayed during the blessing of the paschal candle. The priest celebrant marks the candle with a cross, and between the arms of the cross he inscribes the numerals of the current year. In this rite, so full of meaning, we glimpse the meeting of “through every age and for ever,” the intersection of the Paschal Mystery with the here and now of our daily lives. We recognize, once again, that the Paschal Mystery of Christ—his saving life, Death, and Resurrection—are historical events, yet, so much more. For Christian believers, they are living realities. Through the celebration of

the Eucharist, they are now. For us, time and eternity are not opposites; they are mysteriously intertwined.

There is a definite tension between the Church’s calendar and the secular calendar. This becomes obvious during our penitential liturgical times of Advent and Lent. In Advent, as we quietly await the coming of Christ, we are inundated with all the trappings of the secular observance of Christmas Time, and just when we are decorating our Christmas trees, the world is putting them away! Then, in Lent, we are surrounded with bunnies and chocolate Easter eggs during our weeks of preparation for Easter. We do everything a little differently. For us, the new liturgical year begins not on January 1, but on the First Sunday of Advent; New Year’s Day is celebrated as the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God.

The calendar itself echoes this tension. It is full of the echoes of the pre-Christian world. Our month names come from ancient Rome (“July” and “August” are named for two famous Caesars, Julius and Augustus). The days of the week are mostly from Old

Images of Saints and Feasts of the Liturgical Year (L to R): Saint Benedict (July 11), The Holy Family (Christmas Time), Saint Josephine Bakhita (February 8).

English, named for North Germanic gods and goddesses (“Wednesday,” named for Wodin, “Friday,” named for Freya) or for celestial bodies (“Sunday,” sun’s day, “Monday,” moon’s day, “Saturday,” Saturn’s day). And yet we number our years from Christ’s birth; it is the point from which believers and nonbelievers alike count the years.

The tension between the liturgical calendar and the secular calendar—sometimes intersecting, sometimes not—is a good reminder for us. We are called to be in the world, yet not of the world.

The liturgical year is divided into six periods of liturgical time or “seasons.” These six periods comprise the temporal cycle. The year begins with Advent, the time of waiting for the second coming of the Lord and of preparation for Christmas Time. Christmas Time follows, lasting about three weeks, until the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Lent begins a few weeks after Christmas Time ends and is a period of preparation for Easter Time. The Sacred Paschal Triduum is the shortest time of the year, lasting just three days, but also the most important: just as the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ is the heart of our faith, so this commemoration is the heart of our liturgical year. Easter Time lasts 50 days—because we are a people of the Resurrection! The weeks between Christmas Time and Lent and between Easter Time and preceding Advent, about 33 or 34 weeks in all, are known as Ordinary Time (which means ordinal or “numbered” time).

Within the periods of time during the liturgical year, there are special observances, which are ranked according to their importance for the Church. The highest ranking observances are called solemnities: these include Easter Sunday and the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas); Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe; Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary; Saints Peter and Paul; and other saints. There are local solemnities as well, like the anniversary of the dedication of a church.

Next in rank are feasts, which celebrate mysteries of Christ (the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, for example), and the Blessed Virgin Mary, as well as important saints like the Apostles

and Evangelists. Next come memorials, which are mainly of saints. Some memorials are obligatory, like Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus (also often referred to as Saint Thérèse of Lisieux) on October 1 or Saint Scholastica on February 10. Others are optional in most places, like Saint Patrick on March 17 or Saint Nicholas on December 6.

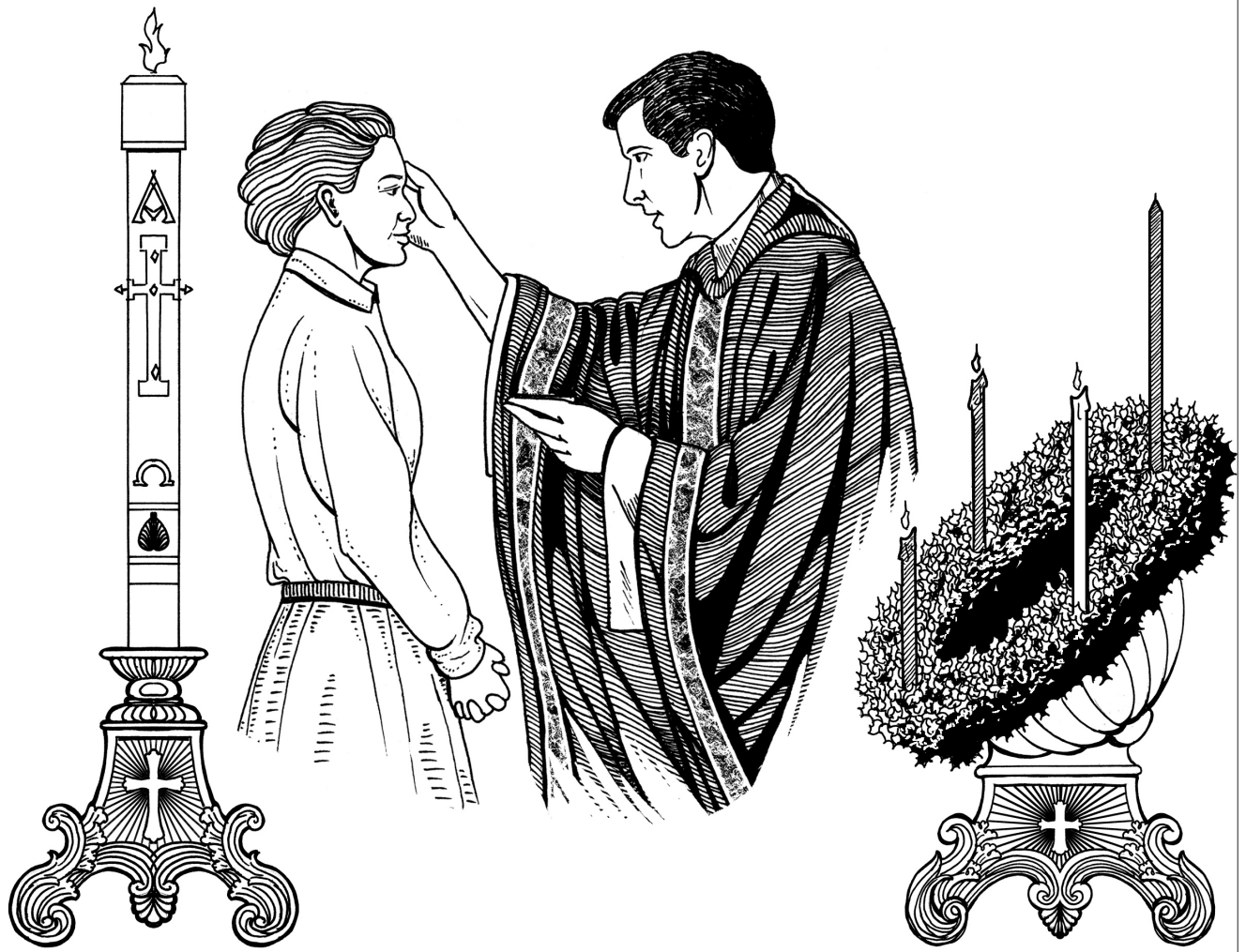
About This Book

This book is intended to help you pray your way through the Catholic liturgical year. It includes introductions to each liturgical time and brief reflections on the saints, feasts, memorials, and commemorations of the year from the *Proper Calendar for the Dioceses of the United States of America* and the *Proper Calendar for the Dioceses of Canada*.

The *Proper Calendar* is a complete listing of all the saints that are observed in these particular countries. There are hundreds of saints, and it would be impossible to honor them all throughout the course of the liturgical year. Calendars were therefore created for each country. There are variations from diocese to diocese and parish to parish because of local patron saints (i.e., the patron saint of a diocese or the patron saint of a parish). These variations are not included in this book.

It is easy to find in this book the saints that are celebrated on the *Proper Calendars* of the United States and Canada. Throughout this book you will see noted in the largest heading the designations of solemnities, feasts, memorials, or optional memorials. An image of the American and Canadian flags have been placed in the headings to designate the proper country (these flags are also included with civic celebrations; see below).

It is important to note that biographies of saints that are not on the *Proper Calendars* of the Dioceses of the United States and Canada have also been included in this book. *Companion to the Calendar, Second Edition* reflects a new awareness of our global Church, with many new entries on sanctoral and devotional observances around the world, from Asia; North, Central, and South America; Europe; and Africa. These entries help us to see our faith through



THE LITURGICAL TIMES

Sunday and the Week

Jesus lived the Jewish Law in its fullness, observing all the feasts and fasts, the processions, and the prayers of his ancestors. Each day was punctuated by prayer, and each week ended with the Sabbath observance, from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday. In the Book of Genesis, we hear that God created the world in six days, and on the seventh day he rested. The Jewish people understood the Sabbath

as God's gift to creation. In resting on the seventh day, God made rest sacred.

The Christian liturgical observance grew out of Jewish worship. The Gospel tells us that Jesus rose "on the first day of the week," the day after the Sabbath (John 20:1). The first day—the day when God created the heavens and earth—is now the day of the new creation, when Christ's Resurrection brings life, unimagined and totally new, out of death. The earliest

Images of Symbols and Rituals of the Liturgical Year (L to R):
The Paschal Candle, Distribution of Ashes, the Advent Wreath.

THE LITURGICAL TIMES

Christians continued to observe the Jewish Law and to keep the ancient Sabbath, but soon “the Lord’s Day,” as it was called, supplanted the older observance.

Sunday was, and is, the heart of Christian worship. In the year 304, the Emperor Diocletian sought to suppress Christianity by forbidding Christians to gather on Sunday. When some Christians in Abitene, in what is now Tunisia, defied his command to gather on Sunday morning to break the bread, they offered no defense except to say, “without Sunday, we cannot live” (quoted by Pope Benedict XVI in a homily for Esplanade of Marisabella, May 29, 2005).

The Sunday Eucharist is the most important prayer of our week, the “center of the whole of Christian life” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 16), but we are called to be people for whom prayer is our “daily bread” (The Lord’s Prayer). Our Church’s liturgy marks every single day with the celebration of the Eucharist and the praying of the Liturgy of the Hours, which (as its name suggests) sanctifies the hours of the day with prayer. The week unfolds with “ferial days”—weekdays—special commemorations of saints and mysteries of faith, and occasional solemnities, all of which open up windows on the living of the Christian life. We are nourished by the Eucharist and by the word of God; through the celebrations of the saints, we are made aware of the great “cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) that surrounds us and urges us on. Through their heroic lives we see how we can live in Christ. In the course of the year we contemplate the mysteries of Christ from his birth through his Death, to his Resurrection and Ascension, and along the way we pause simply to be aware of the mystery of his love in solemnities like the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ and the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. The solemnities, feasts, and memorials of Mary span the entire year, to keep before our eyes the example of the first and best disciple of Christ.

The Sanctoral Cycle

Our liturgy exists to celebrate the Paschal Mystery of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ.

Through the liturgy, Christ’s saving work is remembered and accomplished, for the sacrifice of Christ is renewed in every Mass. In a certain sense, every day, and especially every Sunday, is Easter. Saints’ days, too, are celebrations of Christ and of his Paschal Mystery, for in celebrating the saints we are really celebrating the Christ whose grace strengthened them, whose word guided them, and whose power working through them made them living examples of holiness.

When a member of one’s family dies, survivors often share a belief that they now rely upon the deceased to relay their prayers to God. Many call upon their deceased loved ones for inner strength and in times of need. Some ask for a deceased grandfather or mother to give them advice, or show them a sign to help guide them on life’s journey. These actions usually do not shock people. Yet some appear surprised to learn that Catholics pray through saints and offer them special days and celebrations at Mass. For Catholics, praying to a saint is not all that different from praying through Grandma.

The Church distinguishes saints as men and women outstanding in holiness. In an exemplary way, they model what it looks like to imitate Christ Jesus in a particular time and place. Their life so clearly reflects the kind of living set out by the Gospel that once a person is declared a saint, the Church believes that they enjoy all the benefits of heaven.

Recalling the lives of the saints is one of the defining characteristics of our Catholic identity. Woven into the Church’s calendar, which normally celebrates the events in the life of Christ Jesus (known as the temporal cycle), exists what some have described as a garland of saints’ feasts and memorials. This calendar of saints is known as the sanctoral cycle.

Who are the saints? The calendar includes men and women from every century and every place, famous names and not-so-famous names. They are martyrs—people who were killed for their faith in Christ. They are priests, bishops, and popes, shepherds of the flock. They are virgins, who consecrated their lives to Christ, in a monastery or convent, or outside of it. They are laypeople, married

people, mothers and fathers, leaders of families, and rulers of nations. They are holy men and women. The calendar of saints includes young people like Saint Maria Goretti (July 6), who was martyred at the age of twelve, and Saint Anthony (January 17), who is said to have lived to the ripe old age of 105! There are saints from five continents and from almost every nation on earth. There are saints who spent their lives in silent contemplation, and saints who spent their lives in crowded cities. There are saints who advocated tirelessly for justice, and saints who dedicated themselves to the sick, to the arts, to administration and leadership, to children, to the education of priests, and so much more. The saints remind us of what Jesus said to his friends—“In my Father’s house, there are many dwelling places” (John 14:2). There are many ways to live the Christian life; there are many calls to holiness.

Usually, on saints’ days, the color of the vestment changes from the color of the liturgical time to red or white. Red, the color of witness, is reserved for martyrs; for all other saints, white vestments are worn.

Saints’ days are ranked in various ways. Solemnities are rare—the only saints honored with a solemnity on the calendar are the Queen of Saints, Mary (January 1, August 15, December 8), Joseph (March 19), Peter and Paul (June 29), and John the Baptist (June 24). The feast day of the titular saint of any church is celebrated as a solemnity in that church. And, of course, all the saints are honored on the Solemnity of All Saints (November 1).

Apostles and Evangelists are honored with feasts, including John (December 27), James (July 25), Luke (October 18), and the Archangels (September 29). Important saints have obligatory memorials, meaning they must be observed throughout the world—saints like Teresa (October 15), Jerome (September 30), Vincent de Paul (September 27), and many others. Finally, there are dozens of optional memorials, which the priest may choose to celebrate or not—saints like the martyrs Cosmas and Damian (September 26 in the United States) and Maria Goretti (July 6) fall into this category.

The Temporal Cycle

Advent

Advent begins the liturgical year for the Church. The beginnings of things usually need some advance preparation, and the liturgical year is no different. One way to approach the beginnings of the Christian life is to look at Christ himself. Advent prepares the faithful though joyful waiting and hopeful expectation for Christ’s coming.

Advent begins four Sundays prior to the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas), December 25. While Advent readies us for this joyful anniversary of Christ Jesus’ birth, there is more. Advent contains a double purpose. In addition to the Christmas preparations, it also prepares us for the second coming of Christ at the very end of time.

The first part of Advent draws our attention to the end of time. At Mass during the Eucharistic Prayer, the congregation jubilantly sings “We proclaim your Death, O Lord, / and profess your Resurrection / until you come again.” He will come, as the Nicene Creed says, “to judge the living and the dead.” We sometime refer to this as the second coming. He will rule over all nations. He will judge with justice tempered with mercy. His coming is to bring about a complete integration of peace among all living things: people, animals, nature, and the whole cosmos. We do not know when this will happen. The Scriptures tell us that we do not know the day (see Luke 12:40), but we are to be on the watch (see Matthew 24:42). This waiting and watching characterize the spirituality of Advent. The readings, traditions, and rituals of this liturgical time help Catholics practice the art of joyful anticipation and holy patience.

The second part of Advent serves as a prelude to celebration of the infant birth of Christ Jesus. The focus of the prayers and Scripture during this part of Advent feel much more like Christmas Time. The Scriptures tell the story of the angel Gabriel coming to Mary, and her journey with Joseph to Bethlehem unfolds.

It is said that Advent signifies the four thousand years of waiting for the Messiah to come and

fulfill all the hopes and longings of the people and to bring about the fullness of God's reign. It looks toward the justice and the redemption God has promised with hopefulness and joyful anticipation.

Part of waiting for the Lord's coming includes being ready. Sin and injustice weaken our readiness. They rob us of joy. Advent seeks to restore this joy by our acts of repentance. The Sunday readings of Advent include the stories of John the Baptist proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (see Matthew 3:7–10; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:7–9; John 1:27), for one mightier is coming who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). To more fully prepare for the Messiah, the people acknowledge their sins. Repenting does not need to be an avoided activity. We can easily lose sight of its larger purpose. John the Baptist encouraged repentance for the sake of receiving the Messiah who comes with the Holy Spirit.

Advent offers a time to prepare for oncoming joy. Part of that preparation involves a loving and honest acknowledgement of all that is unloving, unfaithful, and unjust in our lives. As we prepare for the Lord of all nations, we examine our own societies and admit the structures of corruption and injustices that pervade them. Advent affords us the reflection time to see our incompleteness and to ask for his forgiveness. We pray that when he comes, he may be merciful.

The Days of Advent

Gaudete Sunday

Third Sunday of Advent

The Third Sunday of Advent is also known as *Gaudete Sunday*, from the first words of the Entrance Antiphon for the Mass: *Gaudete in Domino semper*, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. / Indeed, the Lord is near" (Philippians 4:4–5). Like the Fourth Sunday of Lent (*Laetare Sunday*), it is a day for rejoicing in the midst of a penitential liturgical time. The organ returns, flowers again grace the altar, and the liturgical color may shift from violet to rose. Why do we rejoice? Because, as Saint Paul says,

"the Lord is near" (Philippians 4:5). Even as we continue to await the Lord's coming, we know that he is already with us: in his word and in his sacraments, and in the Church, which is his body. In a special way, he is with us in his beloved poor.

A new *Gaudete Sunday* custom has developed in Rome in recent years. Each year on the Third Sunday of Advent, the children of Rome bring the *Bambinello* (the figure of the Christ Child) from their home manger scenes to Saint Peter's Square for a special blessing by the Holy Father. In just a few years, this has become a well-loved tradition, so much so that some Romans call the Third Sunday of Advent *Bambinelli Sunday*!

Advent Traditions

The "O" Antiphons

December 17–23

An antiphon is a short passage or verse, usually from Scripture, which is prayed before and after the Psalms and canticles in the Liturgy of the Hours. In the last days of Advent, from December 17 through December 23, the antiphons for the Magnificat at Evening Prayer call upon Christ under the many names used by the prophets in the Old Testament, and ask him to hasten his return. Each of these antiphons begins with "O" (hence their name). The first "O" Antiphon begins, *O Sapientia* (O Wisdom). Then comes *Adonai* (Sacred Lord), *Radix Jesse* (Root of Jesse), *Clavis David* (Key of David), *Oriens* (Dawn), *Rex gentium* (King of peoples), and finally *Emmanuel* (God-is-with-us). The favorite Advent carol, *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*, is actually John M. Neale's translation of these ancient antiphons.

Medieval poets loved intricacies of language, and the first letters of the titles by which Christ is addressed in the "O" antiphons—*Sapientia*, *Adonai*, *Radix*, and so on—form a reverse acrostic, spelling the Latin words that mean "I will be there tomorrow."

Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath is a devotion that originated among the Lutherans of Eastern Germany hundreds

of years ago. The wreath, made of yew, fir, or laurel branches, is often suspended from the ceiling or placed on a table. On the wreath are placed four candles, one for each of the weeks of Advent. Each Sunday, another candle is lit, until, just before the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas), all four candles glow. Often, the candles echo the liturgical colors of Advent, with three violet candles, and one rose candle, lit on Gaudete Sunday, the Third Sunday of Advent (although four violet candles or four white candles may also be used). This devotion began in Germany but has now spread all over the world, and is loved by Christians of many different denominations. We have Advent wreaths at home, at school, and in the church as well.

Why is the Advent wreath so popular? Perhaps because it is such a powerful sign of what we celebrate at Christmas. The wreath of evergreen branches reminds us that even in the darkest days of the year, there is life. And the gradually increasing light of the candles speaks of the fact that at Christmas, Christ, the true light, came into the world: “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” (John 1:5).

Jesse Tree

“A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse” (Isaiah 11:1). The prophecy of Isaiah finds its fulfillment in Christ, sprung, like King David, from Jesse’s line. In recent years, the Advent devotion of the Jesse Tree has gained in popularity. Each day during Advent, a Scripture passage is read, and an ornament is hung on the Jesse Tree. Gradually, the story of the love of God for the human family unfolds, from the creation of the world in the book of Genesis, to the exile and homecoming of the chosen people, to the journey of Joseph and Mary, and, finally, to the birth of Jesus. The Jesse Tree can be an actual tree or a bare branch from which ornaments can be hung. It can also be a poster or wall hanging. Through the Jesse Tree, we come to know the people who prepared the way for the Lord, from Adam and Eve to John the Baptist.

Christmas Time

When children think of Christmas Time, gifts, ribbons, ornamented trees, and Santa Claus come to mind. Families begin preparing weeks in advance. Retailers start months ahead. Family traditions preserve special recipes of sweets and chocolates enjoyed only during this liturgical time. Even with the massive influx of nonreligious objects infused into this time by a secular society, many communities and families retain a strong sense of its core: Christmas remembers God’s gift of his son Jesus who comes as the savior of the world.

Christmas Time is one of the two majestic pillars of the Church’s liturgical year. It has a set date, December (with a Vigil Mass the preceding evening), from which follows a series of celebrations. The Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas Day itself) celebrates the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ to Mary, his mother, and Joseph, her husband. Yet for Catholics that is only the beginning. The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas Day) carries such importance within the life of the Church that it is an entire period of liturgical time lasting nearly three weeks.

The day itself is known by a variety of names. Christmas (“Christ’s Mass”) is most common. Officially, the Church titles it the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord. When referring to the solemnity celebrating this event several words are used interchangeably: Christmas, the Nativity, or the Incarnation.

The celebration marks an event of the Lord and also expresses a part of Church doctrine. The doctrine of the Incarnation states a fundamental Christian belief that God’s divine nature assumed a human nature. In other words, the unseen God became human. Both human and divine natures come together in the person of Jesus Christ. This became known as the “holy exchange,” which tells us that the divine became a human being so that humans could become divine.

Parishes usually offer various opportunities to celebrate Christmas. Following the custom of our Jewish ancestors, a special feast day can begin the

evening before, as soon as the sun sets. Thus, many parishes will begin Christmas Masses on the evening of December 24. These are known as the Vigil Masses. The Mass during the Night (previously called Mass at Midnight) is a great tradition for many Catholics. The Christmas story from Luke's account of the Gospel tells how the angel of the Lord came to the shepherds in the fields during their night watch. Some celebrate Christmas Mass at dawn, and others will attend Christmas morning or day. Catholics are expected to go to only one of these options to prayerfully celebrate the Christmas mystery.

December 25 is not likely the literal day on which Jesus was born. The actual day of his birth is unknown. It was not until after Jesus died and was resurrected that his friends and followers truly realized the significance of his life. Thus, his childhood received little historical attention.

December 25 has remained through the years largely due to its symbolism; however, historical circumstances had a great deal to do with the development of Christmas. In the fourth century, the Church was faced with its first great controversy—the Arian heresy, which denied the divinity of Jesus. At the Council of Nicaea in 325, the Church condemned Arianism, proclaiming Jesus as “God from God, Light from Light, / true God from true God, / . . . consubstantial with the Father” (Nicene Creed). Jesus was not simply a holy creation of God, as the Arians said. Jesus was God Almighty, with God from the beginning, “begotten, not made” (ibid.). Even after the Council of Nicaea, Arianism continued to fester in the Church; the matter was not definitively settled until the Council of Constantinople in 381. It was in this climate of controversy that Christmas developed. The first Christmas at Rome has been dated at around 330, just a few years after the Council of Nicaea.

Christmas proclaims Jesus as the Emmanuel, God-with-us. Other historical circumstances also contributed to the development of Christmas. In 274, the Emperor Aurelian had decreed that December 25—the time of the winter solstice—be dedicated to *Natale Solis Invicti*, a pagan feast in honor of the “Unconquered Sun God.” Given the frequent

scriptural references to Christ as light—the true light, the light of the world—it was easy for the early Christians to “baptize” this pagan feast, and turn the celebration of the sun into a celebration of the Sun of Justice.

There was still another, more potent reason for the celebration of Christmas on December 25: for the early Christians, this was the historical date of Christ's birth. “As early as the third century Christian theologians were endeavoring to calculate the date of Christ's birth, which is not mentioned in the Gospel. The Christ-as-sun symbolism that was so deeply rooted in the Christian consciousness caused them to pay special attention to the equinoxes and solstices” (*The Liturgical Year* by Adolf Adam, p. 123). As a result, the birth of John the Baptist was placed at the summer solstice (“I must decrease,” John 3:30) and the birth of Jesus six months later, at the winter solstice (“he must increase,” ibid.). For people whose lives were impacted by the sun, moon, and natural seasons far more than our own, these times of the year held tremendous meaning. The early Christians could see the Incarnation of the Lord—his birth, his Death, his Resurrection—written in the cosmos.

This mystery of God becoming flesh in the life of Christ Jesus strikes the heart of Christian believers. So rich is this mystery of the Christian faith that Catholics take several weeks and multiple celebrations to ritually unfold this expression of God's love.

The Days of Christmas Time

Octave of the Nativity of the Lord

December 25–January 1

Octave comes from a Latin word meaning “eight.” In music, an octave is an interval of eight notes. In the Church's calendar, an octave is a special period of celebration following a major feast, particularly the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas) and Easter. The Christmas Octave, which ends with the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God on January 1, is a special time to reflect on the great mystery we have celebrated at Christmas: the Incarnation. The Octave of Christmas is full of variety. It includes a

Many wonderful traditions are associated with Epiphany. It is a day for the blessing of homes: one ancient tradition calls for the letters 20 + C + M + B + XX [the numerals of the current year], to be written above the door with blessed chalk (the letters C, M, and B stand for the names of the Magi). In some countries, Epiphany is another day for gift-giving, and children will leave a shoe out the night before, in hopes that the Magi, who of course brought precious gifts for Christ, will leave a gift for them as well. Another favorite tradition throughout most of Europe is the Kings' Cake, a special cake in which a coin (or a bean) is hidden. The cake is cut and eaten, and the person who finds the hidden coin is the "king" or "queen."

Epiphany traditionally takes place on January 6, twelve days after Christmas, though in many countries where January 6 is not a public holiday, the solemnity is now observed on the Sunday after January 1.

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

Sunday after January 6

Christmas Time always ends with a feast in honor of the baptism of the Lord. This feast is celebrated on the Sunday after Epiphany, except when Nativity of the Lord (Christmas) falls on a Sunday; then, in the United States of America, the Baptism of the Lord is transferred to a Monday.

When Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized, John the Baptist exclaimed: "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?" (Matthew 3:14). We might want to ask the same question. Why does Jesus come to be baptized? He is sinless; why does he need to receive John's baptism of repentance? Jesus answers, "it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). In other words, Jesus is baptized because this is God's plan for him—and for us. Jesus is baptized because we need Baptism. He opens the way for us, sanctifying the water, to wash away our sins. An antiphon at Evening Prayer uses vivid imagery to express what happened when Jesus was baptized: "In the Jordan river our Savior crushed the serpent's head and wrested us free from his grasp."

Jesus' baptism marks a change. After his baptism, he begins to proclaim the kingdom of God, to gather disciples, to teach, to heal and to work miracles. He begins his active ministry, leaving behind the "hidden years" of his quiet life with Mary and Joseph in Nazareth. It is the same for all Christians who follow Jesus into the waters of Baptism. Baptism is not an ending, but a beginning. As we receive forgiveness for our sins, we also receive a calling, to live as faithful disciples, and so build up the kingdom.

This feast is usually celebrated on the Sunday after January 6; however, if Epiphany is celebrated on January 7 or 8 (Sunday), in the United States, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is celebrated on the following Monday.

Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

January 1

This solemnity is the most ancient liturgical observance of Mary in the Church's calendar. It honors Mary as *theotokos* or "Mother of God," the title accorded her at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Mary is not just the Mother of Jesus: she is the Mother of God, because Jesus is both God and man, divine and human. As other Marian feasts entered the calendar, January 1 acquired a different focus. The eighth day after birth was the traditional day for the circumcision and naming of a child, and so this became the Feast of the Circumcision of the Lord (and the naming of Jesus). It was only in 1969 that the Marian character of this ancient feast was restored.

Christmas Time Traditions

Christmas Tree

The Christmas tree is almost certainly the favorite of all the home traditions of Christmas. Like the Advent wreath, it began in Germany, where it is traced to the middle ages, when the performance of mystery plays was one of the ways people learned their faith. One such play was called the *Paradise Play*, telling the story of the creation and the fall. At the center of the performance was the *Paradise Tree*, covered in apples and surrounded by candles. The play, usually

performed in Advent, would end with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise and with God's consoling promise that one day he would bring humanity to a new paradise, through Christ, who would die upon the tree of the Cross. When the mystery plays were suppressed, people began to place the *Paradise Tree* in their homes, and gradually the custom of the Christmas tree developed, with ornaments taking the place of the apples.

The primary symbols of the Christmas tree, like the Advent wreath, are life and light. The *Book of Blessings* (BB) includes a prayer for the lighting of a Christmas tree that recalls the origins of the tradition: "your Son, / . . . rescued us from the darkness of sin / by making the cross a tree of life and light. / May this tree, arrayed in splendor, / remind us of the life-giving cross of Christ" (BB, 1587).

Some parishes and schools set up a Giving Tree during Advent. On the tree are hung ornaments with the name of a person in need from a local nursing home, care center, senior housing facility, or family shelters. Each person asks for a gift—usually something simple but necessary like a winter coat or school supplies. Parishioners are invited to take the ornament away with them, and come back before Christmas with the wrapped item. Giving trees allow the community to reach out to those who may not otherwise receive a gift at Christmas.

Las Posadas

December 16–24

Las Posadas ("Lodgings") is one of the most popular Advent and Christmas devotions in Mexico and Central America. Part drama, part prayer, it reenacts the journey of Joseph and Mary through Bethlehem, as they seek a place to stay. Children dressed as "Joseph" and "Mary" knock at the doors of houses, accompanied by "shepherds" who carry lanterns. A traditional song is sung, alternating between those outside and those inside. At last Mary and Joseph find a welcome. *Las Posadas* is not a one-time event but a novena of prayer, repeated each evening, beginning on December 16, and offering each household the opportunity to welcome the Holy Family. *Las Posadas*

is a vivid reminder that the Holy Family still seeks a place to stay, and that when we answer "yes," Christ is born in us again.

Simbang Gabi

December 16–24

Simbang Gabi, a novena of Masses in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is form of the Christmas Novena, originating in the Philippines. The Masses were traditionally offered at dawn, so that fishermen and laborers could attend before going off to work (hence the novena's other name—*Missa di Gallo* or Mass of the Rooster). Associated with *Simbang Gabi* is the *parol*, or star-shaped lantern, which recalls the star that led the Magi to the infant Christ.

Las Parrandas

December 16–26

If you didn't have a telephone, e-mail, parish bulletin, or website, how would you get people to come to Mass each evening during the days before Christmas? You might do what Father Francisco Vigil de Cañones did in 18th century Cuba: he sent children through the town of Remedios, with noisemakers and songs to bring people to the cathedral for Mass. Years went by, and the tradition survived—and grew. Today, the novena of Masses has been somewhat overshadowed by one of the biggest street parties in the world, with floats, lights, and incredible music.

The Manger Scene or Crèche

The manger scene or crèche has been part of how we celebrate Christmas for centuries. The custom is traced to Saint Francis of Assisi, who created the first manger scene in the Italian village of Greccio on Christmas Eve, 1223. He wanted people to do more than read about the Christmas story: he wanted them to see the stable at Bethlehem, and the poverty that surrounded Jesus on the night he was born. And so Francis placed the image of the Christ Child in a real manger, filled with hay, and brought in a live ox and ass to take their places in the scene. The people crowded around this vision of Bethlehem and were

so moved that the manger scene became an annual tradition.

Today, the manger scene continues to be a beloved custom in our homes and churches. Some parishes and schools have a “live crib,” where real people play the roles of Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, and the Magi, and a real newborn baby lies in the manger!

Lent

When people hear “Catholics” and “Lent” spoken in the same sentence, the imagination flashes images of a fish fry in the church basement, meatless Fridays with mac ‘n’ cheese, or Stations of the Cross. Many Catholics recall giving up something they crave such as soda pop, and those of an older generation recall making their pre-Easter obligation to confess their sins.

Lent engages the faithful in rich spiritual renewal unlike any other liturgical time. Catholics exhibit a special devotion to this liturgical time that uniquely distinguishes Roman Catholicism. While Lent entails many things, three central themes emerge. Lent prepares us for Easter and our renewal of our baptismal promises by deepening our identity with Christ through penitential practices. For the adults preparing for Baptism at Easter, Lent affords them rituals to enter into the mystery of Christ Jesus.

This period of liturgical time admits human sin and frailty more clearly than others, yet it emphasizes the strength, growth, and holiness that God offers in the midst of strife. Lent’s promise of redemption reveals Catholicism’s optimism. It demonstrates how the sinful are the very recipients of God’s redeeming grace. Because of God’s grace, freely offered as a gift, we have reason to be joyful.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and concludes on Holy Thursday. Traditional hymns and common thought claim that Lent lasts for forty days. However, counting the days from Ash Wednesday to Holy Thursday amounts to forty-four. How did it grow by four days?

The Council of Nicaea (325) officially recognized Lent as a period of forty days. It prepared the

unbaptized for the more glorious fifty days of Easter. Saint Athanasius, a fourth-century bishop, described a forty-day fast in the vein of Moses, David, and Daniel. He makes no reference to Jesus’ forty days in the desert, an image for Lent that is common today.

Originally, Lent began six Sundays prior to Easter Sunday and concluded as it does today on Holy Thursday. In 1091, Pope Urban II argued for a universal rite of ashes to precede the Lenten fast. Through the years, the distribution of ashes became customary on the Wednesday before the First Sunday of Lent. This practice remains today. Hence, four extra days snuck into Lent’s calendar.

The actual dates change every year because Easter’s date depends upon the lunar and solar calendars. Lent begins sometime in February or March and concludes in late March or most usually April. Check an annual Church calendar (such as LTP’s *Year of Grace*) for exact dates.

Lent is a time of collaborating with God to create something new and divine. Entering into this period of liturgical time with outward rituals of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, combined with the inner work of prayer, believers will be renewed and arrive at Easter eager to welcome the new life of the Resurrection.

The Days of Lent

Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday is one of the most-loved days on the entire liturgical calendar. Coming together to hear the Lord’s call to repentance, and to receive the blessed ashes, is part of what makes us Catholic.

The Collect for Ash Wednesday is one of the most startling prayers we hear all year. This prayer uses imagery of warfare in describing Lent: “Grant, O Lord, that we may begin with holy fasting / this campaign of Christian service, / so that, as we take up battle against spiritual evils, / we may be armed with weapons of self-restraint.” This is a different kind of warfare: it is a battle that takes place within us. Our prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, our “self-restraint,” are the only weapons we have in our fight

take place on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent. To “scrutinize” something means to look carefully at it, to see it in all its aspects. For the elect, the Scrutinies are prayers that are meant to help them examine their lives: “to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful . . . to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good” (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, 141). Through these prayers, the elect continue to grow in awareness of the reality of sin. At the same time, they are strengthened in their fight against evil, and in their desire for salvation.

Each of the Scrutinies follows the same pattern. The elect come forward before the assembly. Special intercessions are prayed for them. Then the priest prays an exorcism, asking God to free them from the power of Satan. The priest then lays hands on each of them, an ancient ritual gesture. Finally, they are dismissed from the assembly.

Laetare Sunday

Fourth Sunday of Lent

“Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her. / Be joyful, all who were in mourning; / exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast” (Isaiah 66:10–11). These words of hope, spoken by the prophet Isaiah to a people in exile, form the Entrance Antiphon for the Fourth Sunday of Lent. In Latin, this antiphon begins with the word *Laetare*, “rejoice,” and so this Sunday is also known as *Laetare Sunday*. Like *Gaudete Sunday* in Advent, it is a day of joy in the midst of a penitential time. Flowers may be used at the altar; the organ and other musical instruments—used only to accompany the singing of the assembly during Lent—make a brief return; rose-colored vestments may be worn.

Why do we rejoice on this day? The answer has its roots in the early Church, when catechumens preparing for Baptism at Easter received the Creed and the Our Father for the first time during the fourth week of Lent. It was another sign that they were soon to receive adoption, in Baptism: a fitting reason for the Church to rejoice! (The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* has restored this ancient custom: catechumens are given the Creed during the week

following the first Scrutiny, just before Laetare Sunday, and the Lord’s Prayer following the third Scrutiny, during the Fifth Week of Lent).

In 1216, Pope Innocent III gave another reason for rejoicing. We need this brief respite from our Lenten fasting, he said, so that we “may not break down . . . but may continue to bear the restrictions with a refreshed and easier heart” (Weiser, Francis X. *Handbook of Christian Feasts and Customs: The Year of the Lord in Liturgy and Folklore*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958. pp. 177–178).

Easter is drawing near: reason enough to rejoice!

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

Sixth Sunday of Lent

“The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, ‘Hosanna! / Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!’” (John 12:12–13). Each year, on Palm Sunday, these words come to life in our churches as we walk in the traditional Palm Sunday procession. We, too, carry branches, and sing Hosanna. And just as the people welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem, we welcome the Christ, the One who comes, in our midst. Our long Lenten observance is drawing to an end, and we hail the Lord with joy and recognition.

Through the centuries, Christians have celebrated the procession of palms with great fanfare. In the Middle Ages, a carved figure of Christ sitting on a donkey (called a *palmesel* or “palm-donkey”) would figure in the procession, drawn on a rolling platform. In other places, choirs of boys would be stationed high on the city walls, to greet the procession with the words of the ancient Palm Sunday hymn as the procession entered the gates: “Glory and honor and praise be to you, Christ, King and Redeemer, / to whom young children cried out loving Hosannas with joy” (*The Roman Missal*).

Today, palms can be shipped across the world, so even in the far north people can carry palms grown in Mexico or in the Holy Land. But it is also appropriate to carry branches of whatever trees are

beginning to bud. In Italy, branches from olive trees are often carried, and in some parts of England and Germany people carry willow branches. In Eastern Europe, people often carry branches of pussy willow or forsythia.

As soon as the procession is done, the mood of the liturgy shifts. In the Collect, we pray that we may “heed [Christ’s] lesson of patient suffering,” knowing that it is not by following him in his triumph, but by walking in the way of his Cross, that we can “share in his Resurrection” (*The Roman Missal*). The readings speak of the suffering of the Lord’s chosen One: in the song of the suffering servant from Isaiah (50:4–7; First Reading), the Church hears the voice of Christ. The Second Reading is a hymn from the letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians, which speaks of Christ emptying himself, and suffering as one of us. These readings prepare us for the reading of Christ’s Passion according to Matthew, Mark, or Luke. The lesson of patient suffering Christ gives us can be hard to hear, and it takes a lifetime to learn it.

Holy Week

Begins with Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

With Palm Sunday, Holy Week begins. We celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord every day of our lives, and especially every Sunday: “It is *Easter* which returns week by week, celebrating Christ’s victory over sin and death,” as Blessed Pope John Paul II has written (*Dies Domini*, 1). But from very early times, there was also an annual celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord, which came to be celebrated shortly after the vernal equinox. And from this great feast flowed others: first a fast in preparation for the great day, then a week, and finally a whole period of preparation—Lent.

Holy Week is about remembering: we trace the events of Jesus’ last days, from his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, to his arrest and trial, to his Crucifixion, Death, and burial, to his Resurrection. We need to be reminded of these historic events, because for us they are more than history: the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, his Paschal Mystery, is a living

reality that shapes our lives. The mysteries we ponder are not past, but present; they are not outside us, but rather, by our Baptism, they have become part of our very being. That is why, at the beginning of the great Easter Vigil, the priest traces the number of the current year on the Paschal candle. Jesus is not then, but now: “all time belongs to him / and all the ages.”

And so, we do more than remember during Holy Week. We share in the mysteries we celebrate. We sit among the disciples in the upper room on Holy Thursday. We stand at the foot of the Cross on Good Friday. We wait beside the tomb on Holy Saturday. And on Easter Sunday, we will share the joy of the holy women at the Good News of Jesus’ Resurrection.

Lenten Traditions

“What are you doing for Lent this year?” It’s a question we often ask, and get asked, as Lent draws near. On Ash Wednesday, in the reading from the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus clearly lays out what it is we are to do: to undertake the time-honored practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

In Lent, our prayer is a prayer of repentance for our sins, a prayer that we may come back to God where we have strayed away from him, a prayer of conversion. But it is also prayer for others, and prayer for the world. Through devotions like the Stations of the Cross, in which we meditate on the last journey of Jesus to the mount of Calvary, we remind ourselves of what Jesus endured for us, and we confront our own sinfulness. We can gain insight to recognize those in our world today who are suffering as Jesus suffered, from violence and injustice. In the *Via Matris*, we meditate on the Seven Sorrows of Mary, from the prophecy of Simeon to the burial of Jesus, pondering the mystery of Christ through the compassion of his Mother. Another time-honored practice for Lent is to read the Gospel accounts of the Passion narratives during Lent, particularly on the Fridays of Lent. There is no better way to ponder the Passion of the Lord than through meditation on the Gospel accounts of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ.

Through our Lenten fasting and abstinence we deprive ourselves of unnecessary things to become more aware of our hunger for God. There are two fasting days in Lent: Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, and all the Fridays of Lent are days of abstinence, when we refrain from eating meat. In addition, most Catholics choose to abstain from other practices that may not be harmful in themselves, but that can absorb our time and energy: whether it's watching TV, surfing the Internet, going on Facebook, playing video games, or eating dessert. Through our fasting and abstinence, we increase our power of self-control, and learn to be aware of our deepest hunger: our hunger for God.

The third spiritual practice Jesus gives his disciples is almsgiving: we are to use the gifts God has given us in the service of the poor and the afflicted, God's beloved ones. But we are to give quietly and humbly—so quietly and humbly that our left hand does not even know what our right hand has done! Through our sacrificial giving, we can help those who are in need, but we can also grow in awareness of the root causes of poverty in our communities and in our world, and become advocates for justice.

The penitential nature of Lent marks an opportune time to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Parishes extend available times for individual confession. Often, this includes an evening for communal reconciliation. For such evenings, a pastor brings a number of priests to the parish so that all who desire can privately confess their sins and celebrate the healing nature of this sacrament.

Some parishes are famous for a Lenten fish fry especially because meat is forbidden on Fridays. As an alternative, soup suppers have grown popular. Meatless soups remind the parish of the simple food that nourishes the poor most days of the year. Some community dinners ask for a free will donation, which usually is given to local charitable agencies.

For over 35 years Catholics have associated this liturgical time with Lenten rice bowls. Catholic Relief Services (CRS), an agency of the United States Conference of Catholic bishops, provides relief to the world's poorest populations. Each year at Lent,

every Catholic parish in the United States receives free CRS materials for every family. Most famously, it includes a cardboard cutout, that folds into a simple "bowl" with a slot for coins. If one fasts from vending machines or snacks, the cash equivalent, along with spare change, accumulates in the bowl. They are called rice bowls, because at the end of Lent, CRS uses the money for the world's poor.

The Sacred Paschal Triduum

Annual rituals mark us. They give us an identity. Similar to a Thanksgiving meal or a Fourth of July cookout, rituals and meals reveal connections to others who share a common history and belief. The Sacred Paschal Triduum lies at the heart of the Catholic faith. It ties us with our Jewish ancestors. It celebrates who we are as God's people today. And it makes new believers for the future of the Church while promising us the awaited fullness of salvation to come in eternity.

For centuries, the Jewish faithful have celebrated the Passover. This meal connects them with their ancestor's flight from slavery to freedom. The meal and what followed forever changed the Jews and their understanding of God.

Christians also believe that at one moment in time, everything changed forever. That came on the night before Jesus died, when he sat down with his disciples for a Passover meal. Instead of bitter herbs and a lamb, he gave them bread and said, "This is my Body," and a cup of wine saying, "This is my Blood." Shortly after this Passover meal, Jesus was arrested, scourged, died on a Cross, and buried. Three days later his tomb was empty. God had raised him from the dead.

The New Testament refers to Jesus numerous times as the Lamb of God. He made the Passover radically new. The blood came not from an unblemished lamb, but from the innocent Son of God. The freedom won by this sacrifice is not just movement from one land to another, but from sin and death into life everlasting.

Catholics annually enter into the Triduum to celebrate the Passover of the Lord. *Triduum* comes from Latin meaning “a space of three days.” It starts on Holy Thursday evening, continues through Good Friday and Holy Saturday, and concludes on Easter Sunday (three days). The rituals on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday comprise one sustained liturgy spanning three days.

The Three Days

Thursday of the Lord's Supper (At the Evening Mass) / Holy Thursday

The Triduum begins with radiant glory at the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. The laws of the Church permit no other parish Masses on this day. Like the Jewish Passover custom, this liturgy begins after sundown.

The Scriptures for the Lord's Supper remain the same each year. The First Reading from the Old Testament recalls how Moses led the Hebrew people out of the land of Egypt. The Lord commanded Moses and Aaron to instruct the people of Israel to sacrifice year-old male lambs, without blemish, and smear the blood on their door. When the angel of death came to their house, it would pass over if it saw the blood of the sacrifice, thus sparing their firstborn child. This passage ends by instituting this as a yearly memorial feast. It lays the foundation for the Christian feast of the Lord's Supper.

The Second Reading recounts the Apostle Paul instructing the people of Corinth to offer a sacrifice of praise. He tells them how on the night before he died, “Jesus took bread, and after he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’” The priest uses a variation of these words at every Mass to consecrate the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.

The Gospel comes from John's account of the Last Supper. Unique among the Gospel accounts, John omits references to bread and wine. Instead, he describes a meal during which Jesus takes a bowl and pitcher of water to wash the disciples' feet. The image

is clear: Eucharist is not simply a ritual meal. It must also move us from worship to service for one another.

Following the homily the priest may wash his parishioners' feet. By imitating the Gospel just proclaimed, the pastor and any associate priests demonstrate the commitment made at their Ordination to serve the community in the likeness of Christ Jesus. The Liturgy of the Eucharist continues as normal, though with these vivid Eucharistic images in the minds of those assembled.

This evening's liturgy ends differently from other Masses. There is no official ending, as this was the beginning of a three-day liturgy. Following the distribution of Holy Communion, an elaborate Eucharistic procession makes its way through the assembly. Using incense, candles, and a processional cross, the priest processes with the consecrated Eucharistic bread to a chapel or side altar. There the faithful can remain in the presence of the Lord. The procession and prayer hint at the somber tone to come on Good Friday.

Friday of the Passion of the Lord / Good Friday

Good Friday commemorates the Crucifixion, Death, and burial of Christ Jesus. Only one liturgy is permitted this day, and it continues the one begun on Holy Thursday evening. The Good Friday liturgy consists of reading the Passion of Jesus Christ, the Adoration of the Cross, and concludes with the reception of Holy Communion.

The liturgy begins in silence as the priest enters the sanctuary and prostrates himself on the floor before the altar and cross. The assembly silently kneels in this gesture of penance. After arising, the Scriptures follow in the usual way.

The First Reading comes from the prophet Isaiah. He tells of an unnamed suffering servant who will give his life for the sins of others. Like an innocent lamb led to slaughter, yet bearing the guilt of many, this servant will see the fullness of light for his sacrifice. The Second Reading offers the image of Christ Jesus as the priest offering his own life. Saint

Paul states this great high priest became the source of eternal salvation.

The highlight of the Scriptures for Good Friday is the Passion reading from John's account of the Gospel. Various details reveal how John's Passion differs in tone and content from the others. Jesus is clearly in command of the course of events. Jesus and Pilate exchange powerful dialogues. John's account of the Gospel introduces an unnamed beloved disciple, who appears at the foot of the Cross with Mary and two others.

Following the homily, the priest or deacon, along with other ministers, presents a large cross to the assembly. The priest chants, "Behold the wood of the Cross, / on which hung the salvation of the world." All respond, "Come, let us adore." So closely identified with Christ himself, the cross receives the adoration of the faithful. One by one all approach, to genuflect, kneel, caress, touch, or softly kiss it in an act of worship. This simple liturgy ends with the distribution of Holy Communion from hosts consecrated at the Holy Thursday liturgy. All depart in silence, longing for a joyful conclusion to this prayer come Saturday night.

The Easter Vigil in the Holy Night / Holy Saturday

Lent and Holy Week reach a climax at the Easter Vigil. This solemnity of all solemnities begins after sundown on Holy Saturday. Like the ancient Jewish custom, Catholics believe the sun's setting completes a day, and therefore the festivals for the next day (Easter Sunday) may begin. The Vigil starts outdoors with all gathered around a fire. A new and stately paschal candle takes its flame from the fire, and the priest blesses it as the light of Christ. All process into the empty church, illuminated only by vigil candles to hear the *Exsultet* (Easter Proclamation), an ancient text summarizing the significance of this holy night. The procession of light concludes and leads to the Liturgy of the Word.

This night calls for a more generous use of the Scriptures to emphasize God's saving work throughout history. The rite offers no fewer than seven Old

Testament readings, each followed by a Responsorial Psalm. Fittingly, the creation story itself is first, followed by Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. The vivid imagery of Moses leading the Hebrew people through the Red Sea to freedom from their Egyptian oppressors prominently highlights the significance of this night. Passing through water to new life foreshadows the Baptisms that will take place in this celebration. Readings from Isaiah and the prophet Hosea are also offered.

The New Testament reading is always from Romans, when Paul reminds the believers of the significance of their Baptism. In that ritual they died to Christ and were given the divine promise to live with him forever in his Resurrection. After fasting from Alleluias for six weeks of Lent, musicians jubilantly lead the community in this act of praise before the Gospel account of the Lord's Resurrection from the dead.

The third major act of this night, the Baptism of the elect, follows the homily. The priest baptizes each adult and then must confirm them with the oil of chrism. Having witnessed these new believers professing their faith, the entire assembly then renews their own baptismal promises and signs themselves with the fresh baptismal waters.

Clothed in radiant white garments, like the image of the Risen Lord, the newly baptized join the assembly for the first time at the Lord's table for the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The liturgy concludes in the normal way, with the addition of a double Alleluia to the final blessing to signify the jubilant nature of this solemnity.

Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord

Easter Sunday crowns the Triduum celebrations and begins a new period of time within the liturgical year. Easter Sunday is the pattern and purpose for all other Sunday celebrations of the year. Having fasted from the Gloria and Alleluias during Lent, both return with joyous song on this day. Like all other Sundays, two readings and a Psalm precede the Gospel. The First Reading now comes from the Acts of the Apostles. Easter Sunday begins a time of reflecting

upon how the followers of Jesus came to receive and understand Christ's Resurrection from the dead.

On Easter Sunday, a special Sequence is sung before the Gospel account. In beautiful poetry, it speaks of the joy of the disciples at the Good News of Christ's Resurrection.

In the United States, the priest renews the baptismal promises of the faithful and sprinkles them with the fresh waters of Baptism blessed at the Vigil. The Liturgy of the Eucharist follows as normal. Like the Vigil, Easter Sunday concludes with a dismissal to go in peace, which is followed by a double Alleluia. This punctuates the day with a final exclamation mark signifying the extraordinary works God has done for those who place their faith and trust in his saving works. *Alleluia! Alleluia!*

Sacred Paschal Triduum Traditions

The most important prayers of the Triduum are, of course, the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday; the celebration of the Passion of the Lord on Good Friday; and the Vigil in the Holy Night of Easter. But through the centuries, the faithful have prayed during the Sacred Triduum in many other ways, and these traditions—many of them alive today—can help focus our attention on the great mysteries we celebrate during these holiest of days.

On Holy Thursday, at the conclusion of the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, the Blessed Sacrament is carried to an altar of repose, a special place for adoration, usually adorned with flowers. It is placed in the tabernacle, and the faithful remain in adoration through the evening hours, until midnight. In many cities around the world, the custom developed of making a pilgrimage on Holy Thursday night, to pray at the altar of repose at seven different churches.

Many devotions developed around Good Friday, which has touched the world's imagination in a special way. The best-known of these is the *Via Crucis*, the Way of the Cross, which consists of fourteen stations or moments in Jesus' last hours, from his condemnation by Pilate to his burial. The Stations

of the Cross are especially associated with Good Friday but they are prayed throughout Lent. On this day in Rome, the Holy Father prays the Stations in the Colosseum, with tens of thousands of people.

In some parts of the world, there is a procession of the dead Christ on Good Friday, as a statue of the dead body of Jesus is carried in silence through the streets, accompanied by throngs of the people, who walk in procession, like mourners at a funeral. Passion plays are also a familiar element of Holy Week and of Good Friday in some countries, as the events of Christ's Passion and Death are reenacted in the streets, to bring the events of Holy Week vividly before the eyes of the faithful.

The Seven Last Words is a devotion around the seven last sayings ("words") of Jesus from the Cross, with readings from scripture, homilies, and reflections on the Passion of Christ. It is often incorporated into a *Tre Ore* or "Three Hours" service, commemorating the hours Jesus hung upon the cross, from noon until three o'clock.

A number of Holy Week devotions are associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary, including devotions to Our Lady of Sorrows, and, on Holy Saturday, the *Ora della Madre* or *Ora di Maria*, an hour-long vigil recalling the sadness, patience, and hope of the Blessed Virgin Mary, waiting at the tomb of her Son.

Various devotions have sprung up around Easter as well. A well-loved tradition has it that the risen Christ first appeared to his mother Mary. This meeting is commemorated in some countries with a celebration called the *Encuentro*, or "the encounter." Two processions, one with the image of Our Lady of Sorrows, the other with the image of the Risen Christ, meet at the doors of the Church, with music and prayer.

Easter marks the end of our long Lenten fast, and in some places the traditional blessing of food for the first meal of Easter takes place before or after the Easter Vigil. For centuries, eggs have been a traditional part of the Easter meal, since eggs were considered "meat" and were not eaten during Easter Time. A blessing for Easter food is found in chapter II of the *Book of Blessings*.

Easter Time

When Easter arrives, children proudly show off new clothes and bright dresses. Families assemble baskets with chocolates and other favorite indulgent foods. The Lenten fast has finished. Signs of new life abound, from greening lawns and flowering trees, to images of bunnies, lambs, and chicks. All this, expresses the bold and fascinating mystery of Jesus Christ, the crucified One, who has been resurrected from the dead.

Easter Time announces Christ is risen! This gives reason to sing Alleluia with full voice! Christ Jesus, having endured the suffering and death on the Cross, did not allow evil to be the last word. He defeated death. Like a morning star, Christ Jesus illuminates the darkness of fear and gives believers a path to eternal hopefulness. As Christ emerges from the tomb of death, the Church proclaims salvation for all. God's peace will reign.

The redemptive work of Christ celebrated on Easter Sunday becomes the pattern for all Sunday liturgies and in fact, for all feasts throughout the liturgical year. It is so significant an event that the Church celebrates Easter Time for fifty days. To absorb its powerful impact on the human family, the Church celebrates a week of weeks (seven times seven) plus one extra day. It symbolizes the fullness of time. The long duration ritualizes Easter as the perfect event restoring all of creation and pointing it toward eternity.

Celebrating the Newly Baptized

Easter Time rejoices with those who were baptized at the Easter Vigil. Easter Time acts as one extended celebration. Baptism initiates a new life of faith. With it comes the promised gift of salvation. Saint Paul's words to the Romans, recounted at the Easter Vigil, summarizes the connection between Baptism and Resurrection in this way: "Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? . . . For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection. . . . If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him" (Romans 6:3ff.).

In the early Church, baptismal fonts were pools described as a tomb and a womb. As a tomb, it drowns out one's sins. Yet as a womb, the font gives birth to a life of faith in the Church and in Christ Jesus. Still today, Baptism by immersion is a living icon of Christ, rising from the tomb, radiant with new life.

With the neophytes (the newly baptized), the Church uses Easter Time to reflect upon the extraordinary events of the Vigil. This process is called *mystagogy*. The neophytes should continue deepening their faith and their understanding of how Christ Jesus is present to them in the word and sacraments of the Church. Homilies during Easter can develop a spiritual awareness of the Easter Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. The power of Christ's unseen presence in those rituals is so rich, that it deserves the luxury of time to thoroughly unpack layers of meaning.

The Days of Easter Time

Octave of Easter

Easter Sunday through the Second Sunday of Easter

Easter Time, like Christmas Time, is too big for just one day: it overflows into an entire period of liturgical time, lasting fifty days. The first eight days, the Octave of Easter, is a time of special celebration, lasting until the Second Sunday of Easter. In the early Church, the neophytes—those who had been baptized at the Easter Vigil—wore their white garments throughout this week. In fact, the Second Sunday of Easter was called *Dominica in albis*, "Sunday in white" because of this!

Today, our liturgy marks these special days with the singing of the Gloria and the Alleluia, and with the Easter Sequence, *Victimae Paschali laudes*, "Christians, to the Paschal Victim," which recalls the meeting of Mary Magdalene with the risen Christ. "Speak, Mary, declaring / What thou sawest, wayfaring. / 'The tomb of Christ, who is living; / The glory of Jesus' resurrection; / Bright angels attesting; / The shroud and napkin resting.'" During the Masses of this week, we hear the Gospel accounts of the

But the Ascension isn't just about looking up. It's also about looking around us. In the Entrance Antiphon for the Mass during the Day, we hear words from the Acts of the Apostles: "Men of Galilee, why gaze in wonder at the heavens? / This Jesus whom you saw ascending into heaven / will return as you saw him go, alleluia" (Acts of the Apostles 1:11). We do not need to gaze into the sky, searching for our Lord. Because even as he goes, he remains with us: "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). We need only look around us to find signs of his abiding presence in our midst, in his Body, the Church, in the sacraments, and in his beloved poor.

The Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord traditionally takes place on Thursday of the Sixth Week of Easter, exactly forty days after Easter. But because for most people that is a working day, many ecclesiastical provinces in the United States of America observe this day on the nearest Sunday, and it takes the place of the Seventh Sunday of Easter. The readings and prayers of the Ascension of the Lord will then replace those of the Seventh Sunday of Easter.

Solemnity of Pentecost

Last Sunday of Easter Time

Easter Time comes to its glorious conclusion with the great Solemnity of Pentecost.

Pentecost was a Jewish harvest feast, celebrated fifty days after Passover (hence the name "Pentecost," which means *fiftieth* in Greek). At Pentecost, bread made from the newly-harvested grain would be offered to God. The feast also commemorated the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai.

It was while Jews from every nation were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate this feast that the Spirit came upon the disciples gathered in prayer, like wind and fire. They must have remembered the Exodus account of the giving of the law to Moses, when there was a sound like a trumpet blast, and fire and smoke (see Exodus 19:16–19). But the contrasts between the giving of the Law and the giving of the Spirit are even more striking than the similarities. At Sinai, Moses alone went up to receive the immutable

word of God carved on tablets of stone. On the day of Pentecost the Spirit came down to the people and rested on each of them in a play of wind and fire. The Spirit cannot be contained, or written down. The special sequence, *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*, "Come, Holy Spirit," that is prayed during Mass today addresses the Spirit with many different titles and images—the Spirit is "Father of the poor," "comforter," "sweet refreshment," "solace," and "light." The multitude of images suggests the free play of the Spirit.

In the Middle Ages, this free play of the Spirit was expressed in many creative ways in the great cathedrals. In some parts of France, wind instruments would fill the church with sound, while roses and other flowers would be dropped on the assembly. In other places, live doves would be set free to fly through the church. These customs spoke to the people about the nature of the Holy Spirit: gentle, yet impossible to contain or control.

Pentecost is sometimes called "the birthday of the Church," because it was only after they were filled with the gifts of the Spirit that the Apostles set forth on the mission Christ gave them, to preach the Good News, and to baptize all nations. The Spirit transformed them, and transforms us.

Easter Time Traditions

Lent is full of special devotions, and Easter Time has its devotions as well. One of the best-known of these is certainly the Divine Mercy. Another is the *Via Lucis* or Way of Light. Modeled on the Way of the Cross (*Via Crucis*), the *Via Lucis* is a journey with the risen Christ, from the first Easter morning to Pentecost.

The blessing of families in their homes is an old custom, particularly associated with Easter Time. In some small communities, it is still possible for the priest, deacon, and assisting clergy to visit every home in the parish during Easter Time, bringing the message of Christ's peace. Though that has become more and more difficult, the tradition of blessing the family and the home remains, and the useful resource *Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers*, published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, includes an order of blessing that can be used by

anyone to bless their home (p. 128). A house blessing is especially appropriate for Easter Time, when we celebrate Christ's abiding presence in our world, our Church, our hearts—and our homes.

The word *novena* is Latin for “nine,” and it refers to a special time of prayer to God, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, or to a particular saint. The nine days between Ascension and Pentecost form the “first” novena. When Jesus ascended, he told his disciples, “I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). And the disciples remained in Jerusalem, in prayer, until the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost sent them forth to preach the Good News to the whole world. These nine days continue to be a special time of grace, and the novena is observed with prayer to the Holy Spirit in the home, and in many parishes.

The gifts of the Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. The Pentecost novena is the perfect time to pray for a fuller outpouring of these gifts upon ourselves, upon the Church, and upon our communities and our world.

World Day of Prayer for Vocations

Fourth Sunday of Easter

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is also known as *Good Shepherd Sunday* (see page 19), because the readings and prayers speak of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Since 1964, this day has also been designated the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Pope Paul VI instituted this day of prayer to Christ, the great shepherd of souls, that Christ might inspire many young men and women to dedicate their lives to service in the Church.

Our need today is greater than ever. We need priests to build up the Body of Christ by celebrating the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. We need dedicated, religious men and women to pray, to teach, and to serve in the name of Christ. Today, let us pray in obedience to Christ, who told his disciples to “ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:38)

World Communication Day

Sunday before the Solemnity of Pentecost

On the Sunday before Pentecost, the Church observes the World Day for Communications. This observance was established in response to *Inter mirifica*, the Decree on Social Communications of the Second Vatican Council. The Council Fathers wrote: “Among the wonderful technological discoveries which men of talent, especially in the present era, have made with God’s help, the Church welcomes and promotes with special interest those which have a most direct relation to men’s minds and which have uncovered new avenues of communicating most readily news, views and teachings of every sort. The most important of these inventions are those media which, such as the press, movies, radio, television and the like, can, of their very nature, reach and influence, not only individuals, but the very masses and the whole of human society, and thus can rightly be called the media of social communication. The Church recognizes that these media, if properly utilized, can be of great service to mankind, since they greatly contribute to men’s entertainment and instruction as well as to the spread and support of the Kingdom of God” (*Inter Mirifica*, 1–2). Since the Council, the Internet has opened up many new avenues of communication, and true to the Council’s teaching, the Church has striven to keep up. Blessed Pope John Paul II became the first pope to send an e-mail; Pope Benedict XVI is the first to send a text message and to have his own Facebook page! We are all called to share the Gospel with the world in whatever way we can.

Ordinary Time

Ordinary Time: even the name of this period of liturgical time gives this time period an air of unimportance. The word *ordinary* usually equates to boring, unfulfilling, or stagnant. Yet, life is not meant to be lived always at fever pitch. The Latin derivative *ordinarius* means “following the usual course.” The word *ordinary* also comes from the word *ordinal*

meaning “counted.” This period of 33 or 34 weeks is counted time outside of the other liturgical times.

As taught by Jesus, the usual course was one of teaching, ministering, and then going off—alone—to pray. Jesus called his disciples, and calls us, to do that same. While the “usual course” that Jesus followed is rather different than our usual course of life, we are called to pause and reflect upon the love taught for both others, and individually, in this down time.

The Collect for the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time shares the depth of this counted time:

Almighty ever-living God,
direct our actions according to your
good pleasure,
that in the name of your beloved Son
we may abound in good works.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity
of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

We need this “ordinary time” in life. In fact, we need to protect the “ordinary time” so we can claim ourselves, our identity, our roots, and our strength. This is the gift Ordinary Time offers.

In every other liturgical time—Advent, Christmas Time, Lent, Triduum, and Easter Time—there is great intensity of life, reflection, prayer, and a big celebration focusing on a very specific aspect of the life of Jesus. Yet scripture is not complete without a full understanding of Jesus’ own identity, his own call, his own proclamation to understand his message. Thus, Ordinary Time gives the Church a space to breathe and each of us time to gain a deeper understanding into the heart of Jesus.

Ordinary Time officially begins following Evening Prayer on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord; thus, there is no First Sunday in Ordinary Time. This liturgical time continues until the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. The length of this segment of Ordinary Time varies depending upon the date of Easter. In some years, this can seem too quick of a time between Christmas and Lent. Thus, as with a typical

growing child, if one doesn’t pay attention, the milestones of life are missed. During Ordinary Time we are called to be aware of both Jesus’ milestones and also be conscious of our own spiritual growth.

The Scripture readings during the first segment of Ordinary Time teach us of Jesus’ early life, his little-known childhood, and his public ministry. The focus is on how we can model our lives and faith from Jesus’ own actions and growth. The symbolic color of Ordinary Time is green, symbolizing new life, growth, rebirth, and rootedness. The Church is always alive and growing.

Lent arrives and calls us to strengthen our inner souls, but it is a long and intense time followed by fifty days of great celebration. After Lent, the Sacred Paschal Triduum, and Easter Time, we enter the longest period of Ordinary Time to continue to learn about Jesus and his many teachings that define our identity. This time in Scripture we hear of Christ’s vision for the Kingdom of God, how we are to get there, and give full honor to Jesus as Christ, King of the Universe. This latter solemnity falls on the last Sunday or Thirty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time.

We are ordinary people following an extraordinary God calling us to better ourselves in the call to holiness each day, each week, each time we receive the Eucharist. The liturgical appropriateness of Ordinary Time fits the spiritual nuances of life. One cannot live on the mountaintop forever nor disappear into the valleys for too long. The climb in between might be quiet, but it is just as important as all the other moments. The Church knows this and understands the time needed to craft our souls into that deep longing for the big moments, for without valuing ordinary time, all other time would lose its full importance.

The Days of Ordinary Time

Carnival

Sunday before Ash Wednesday

Our Lenten laws of fasting and abstinence today are very mild compared to those of previous centuries. We have only two obligatory fasting days