

07-08 Non-Gathered Session #4

Theme: The Liturgical Year

Summary

The Church has a special year, called the liturgical year, to mark the celebration of her liturgies. The liturgical year is built around important historical events—such as Jesus' birth, death, and Resurrection—in which God's saving power was made real. The liturgies in the liturgical year help us remember God's saving power made real in those historical events. They celebrate that God is saving us in the present moment, and they look forward to the time when God's plan of salvation will reach its ultimate fulfillment in Christ's future Parousia (Second Coming). The seasons of the liturgical year are as follows:

- Advent. The liturgical year begins in late November or early December, on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. These four weeks are the liturgical season of Advent. Advent means "coming," and this season is a preparation for the coming of the infant Jesus.
- Christmas season. The feast of Christmas, on December 25, celebrates the birth of Jesus and the mystery of the Incarnation. God entered the world as an infant, fully human in every way. It is a joyful feast, during which we remember that God is with us, bringing hope and joy to the world by sharing in our humanity.
- The feast of Christmas is really the start of the Christmas season, which lasts until the Baptism of the Lord, the third Sunday after Christmas Day. In some cultures gifts are still exchanged on the feast of the Epiphany (January 6), which celebrates the Magi from the east visiting Jesus. Many Christians are returning to the practice of having parties, caroling, and gift exchanges during the Christmas season in order to reclaim Advent as a quiet, more reflective time in preparation for the joy of Christmas.
- Ordinary Time. After the high of the Christmas season, we enter a short period of Ordinary Time. During Ordinary Time the Scripture readings focus on the events of Jesus' life between his birth and his death and Resurrection. It is a time when we reflect on the things Jesus lived and taught so that we might make our values and attitudes more like his. Ordinary Time is divided into two periods. The first period is between Christmastime and Lent, and the second period is between the end of the Easter season and the next Advent.

- Lent. Lent is a solemn, reflective season of the liturgical year that is the preparation for the mysteries of Easter. It begins on Ash Wednesday, and lasts forty days, until Easter (the forty days do not include the Sundays during Lent). The forty days of Lent recall the forty days that Jesus spent in the desert before beginning his public ministry. During Lent Christians are called to renew themselves through fasting, prayer, and almsgiving (giving money and service to those in need).
- Week begins a week before Easter Day, on Palm Sunday. During Holy Week we remember the events of the final days of Jesus' earthly life, beginning with his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.
- The Triduum. The last three days of Holy Week bring everything to a climax in a series of three special liturgies, called the Triduum. In the Holy Thursday liturgy, we remember the Last Supper and Jesus' gift of himself in the Eucharist. In the Good Friday liturgy, we remember Jesus' Passion and death. The liturgy on Holy Saturday is held at night, and is called the Easter Vigil. It is the greatest celebration of the liturgical year, recalling and reliving the joy of Christ's Resurrection. The highlight of the Easter Vigil is the Baptism, Confirmation, and First Communion of the catechumens, those people who have been preparing to become Catholic.
- Easter season. Easter and the Easter season are the primary focus of the liturgical year. Easter celebrates the wonder and joy of Christ's Resurrection, the central mystery of our faith. The Easter season goes on for fifty days after Easter, until the feast of Pentecost. During this time the Sunday readings focus on the appearances of the risen Christ and on the growth of the early Church (found in the Acts of the Apostles).
- Forty days after Easter, on the Ascension of the Lord (although this is a Thursday, it is celebrated in many dioceses on the following Sunday), we remember how Jesus said farewell to his disciples in order to live in glory with his heavenly Father and be present to all his followers without the limitations of time and space. We remember the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles at Pentecost. After Pentecost the second period of Ordinary Time continues, until another liturgical year begins on the first Sunday of Advent.

(All summary points are taken from *The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth*, by Brian Singer Towns et al. [Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2004], pages 138–142. Copyright © 2004 by Saint Mary's Press. All rights reserved.)

I. After reading the above summary, define the following in your own words:

- Advent
- Christmas season
- Ordinary time
- Lent
- Holy Week
- Triduum
- Easter season

II. Reflect on the summary you just read to answer the following:

- What is your favorite liturgical season? Why?
- Name some traditions that you or your family participates in during various liturgical seasons of the year.
- Do you have a patron saint? If so, when is the feast day of your patron saint? What are some ways you might celebrate the day?
- How do you respond to family traditions?
- How do you respond to Church traditions?

III. Liturgical Quiz. Please answer the following:

- The calendar year begins on January 1. When does the Church's liturgical year begin?
- What is the beginning of the Christmas season and when does it end?
- What is the primary focus of the liturgical year?
- Why do some Catholics exchange gifts on January 6?
- What season follows the Christmas season?
- How do Christians renew themselves during Lent?
- When counting the forty days of Lent, what special days do we leave out?
- According to the Church, what are the holy days of obligation?
- Which sacraments are commonly celebrated during the Easter Vigil?
- How long is the Easter season and which feast does it end?
- What event is commemorated by the feast of Pentecost?
- Which feast occurs forty days after Easter?
- Which Church season follows the Easter season?
- What do we celebrate on saints' feast day?

IV. Match the following Holy Days with the scripture passage.

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| Last Supper | Matthew 21:6-11 |
| Pentecost | Mark 16:19 |
| Ascension | Luke 22:14-20 |
| Palm Sunday | Matthew 2:1-12 |
| Epiphany | Acts 2:1-4 |