

Liturgical Living:
Inviting God into Everyday
Moments

THE LITURGICAL HOMESTEAD

theliturgicalhomestead.com

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Table of Contents

The Basics

What is Liturgical Living?

Liturgical Colors

Liturgical Seasons

Liturgical Calendar

Relationship

Prayer at home

“5 Alive”

Penitential Times

Advent

Lent

Fridays

Ember and Rogation Days

Celebratory Times

Holy Days of Obligation

Reclaiming Catholic Feast Days

Saints for your family

Name Days, Birthdays, and Sacramental

Anniversaries

Cultural, Occupational, Hobbies, and Struggles

Welcoming Jesus

Glossary

Resources

1.

The Basics

(The Catholic faith has a language of its own that can sometimes feel intimidating and confusing. Words in bold are in the glossary at the back of the booklet.)

We often make the mistake of thinking that the saints were perfect and that *we* could never become saints, but all of us are called to sainthood! According to the USCCB (the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops), “Saints are persons in heaven (officially canonized or not), who lived heroically virtuous lives, offered their life for others, or were martyred for the faith, and who are worthy of imitation.” *Anyone* who is in heaven with God is a saint, whether we know about that heroic virtue, whether they were canonized or not!

This doesn’t mean that the saints were perfect throughout their whole lives. They had their faults and struggles, but their love of God transformed them. Their lives should be encouragement for us that we too can be transformed by God if we are willing to cooperate with His **grace**! We can do that, in part, by making a point to live liturgically.

What is Liturgical Living?

The most basic definition of the term **liturgy** is “the work of the people,” and it describes practices that are religious in nature.

In the Catholic **Church**, you will most commonly hear the term liturgy used in reference to the **Mass**: the Liturgy of the Word, and the Liturgy of the **Eucharist**. These are the two most readily recognizable parts of the Mass, where we hear God’s word and listen to a homily, and where the gifts of bread and wine become the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ.

We might also think of the liturgical year, the cycle of **seasons** and **feast** days celebrated throughout the year. It begins with **Advent** and ends with the celebration of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. (Maybe you haven’t paid much attention to what was being done at Mass, but you probably *have* noticed that the colors worn by the priest and deacon change from time to time!)

You might even be familiar with the Liturgy of the Hours, a collection of prayers and readings from Sacred Scripture prayed by most people in religious life and also some of the **laity** (anyone who is not a religious brother, sister, priest, or deacon).

And while all of those things are a part of “liturgical living,” they still don’t quite capture it completely. For some, hearing the term “liturgical living” produces thoughts of fun recipes or cute crafts, but liturgical living is not just for children or for families with young ones. Liturgy is *all* of the ways in

which we offer our time to God for sanctification. In other words, it’s all the ways (small or large) that we invite God into our days. Sanctification is the process of making something holy. Of course, *we* don’t make our time holy, but it *becomes* holy when we offer it to God.

Saying our prayers first thing in the morning, before meals, and before bed are all part of it. Volunteering at the food bank, donating diapers to the pregnancy crisis center, praying for the person the ambulance is heading towards, helping with a funeral lunch... It’s signing your children with the cross before they head to bed or out the door for school or sports or work, singing a hymn while you fold laundry, or listening to the Bible as you make your commute to work. All of that is a part of it, especially when we invite God into it!

The purpose of liturgical living is to live the life of the Church not just at Mass on Sundays, but throughout the whole year, in our daily lives and in our homes. Through the liturgical calendar, we learn more about Christ. We learn about those who are brothers and sisters through the waters of baptism and their love for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Liturgical Colors

There are primarily four colors that we see in our liturgical celebrations: Green, White, Purple, and Red. But we might also see Rose, Black, Blue, and Gold. Everything in the Church has a

purpose and a meaning, including the colors we use throughout the year.

Green is the color used for “Ordinary Time.” It reminds us of growth. Holiness is something we can grow in every day, in the “ordinary” flow of our lives. This color is a symbol of hope and new life.

White indicates a special type of celebration, and reminds us of the Light of Christ, purity, and the joy of resurrection. It is used for the Easter and Christmas seasons, feasts of Mary, and of some of the saints.

We see purple during Advent (the season leading up to Christmas) and **Lent** (the season preceding Easter). Purple signifies waiting and preparation. Scarlet or purple color was also the color of royalty and reminds us of Christ’s Kingship.

Red represents blood and is the color used on the feast days of the **martyrs** of the Church. It is used on Palm Sunday and Good Friday for Christ’s Passion, and again on Pentecost as a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

Twice during the year, the color “rose” (or pink) is used—partway through the seasons of Advent and Lent, on Gaudete Sunday and Laetare Sunday (both words translate to “rejoice” from Latin). However, not all parishes have rose colored **vestments**, in which case, they will continue using the same purple throughout the rest of Advent and Lent. Rose represents love, hope, and joy.

Black is infrequently used and is reserved for funerals and All Souls Day. It is the color sorrow, mourning, and death. Like the color rose, not all parishes own black vestments, and even if they do, it still remains at the priest discretion to use either black or purple, or if for a funeral, white may also be used as it signifies the hope of the resurrection of the dead.

Occasionally, you might see vestments that are partially blue. These are used on Marian feast days, in honor of Our Blessed Mother, and represent the mantle of Mary. Again, not all parishes own these, and it is optional to use. Blue is a symbol of purity and holiness. (Spain is the only place where it is permitted to wear vestments that are totally blue for liturgical celebrations. They are used exclusively for the feasts of Mary.)

And finally, you might see a priest wearing golden vestments, which can be worn in place of white on particular solemnities. These are reserved for Christ and it symbolizes the glory of Christ.

If you want to remind yourself of where we are in the liturgical year outside of the Mass, you can decorate your home with the liturgical colors. This might be done by keeping a vase of flowers that emphasize the current color, a table runner on the dining room table, or a cloth of the current color on a home **altar** or prayer space/table, though you could certainly get creative with how you display the color. (Most people who do this simply use green, white, and purple.)

Liturgical Seasons

The liturgical calendar is comprised of a number of periods of time which are referred to as seasons. Green, which represents Ordinary Time, is used throughout two segments of time during the year: for a few weeks between the Christmas season and Lent, and after Pentecost until the start of Advent.

The liturgical calendar begins with the season of Advent, which starts either at the end of November or beginning of December and lasts until Christmas. The Christmas season officially begins with the **vigil** Mass on December 24th and lasts until the feast of the Baptism of Our Lord (a jump to a moment in His adult life when He was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River), which happens the Sunday after the Epiphany. (Epiphany is when we remember the three “kings” or “magi” who came to visit Jesus after His birth). After this, we begin the first period of Ordinary Time.

This first segment of Ordinary Time ends when Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, which is a moveable date based on when Easter will occur. (Easter is calculated based on when the first full moon will occur, on or after the spring equinox. Technically, Lent concludes the Wednesday before Easter, though the penitential time does not cease. In between, there is a three-day season known as Triduum: Holy Thursday (or Maundy Thursday), Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, the days we remember the Last Supper and the Institution of the Eucharist,

Christ’s betrayal, Passion and Death, and His time in the tomb. This season concludes as we celebrate the Easter vigil.

Easter is a *fifty*-day period of joyful celebration and feasting, and yet, how many of us actually celebrate beyond Easter Sunday?! This season is comprised of two parts. The first portion lasts 40 days, and concludes with the Ascension of the Lord, when we meditate on Jesus’ ascension into Heaven. This is followed by a nine-day period of waiting and prayer that the disciples experienced (this is where we get the **tradition** of praying a “novena”- a nine day prayer), and on the tenth day, we celebrate Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit (when Red is worn). With that, we conclude the Easter season and enter into the remaining period of Ordinary Time which lasts until Advent begins again.

Though technically Ordinary Time, the first two Sundays after the conclusion of the Easter season, you will likely still see your priest wearing white, because we celebrate the feasts of the Most Holy Trinity (and the Visitation) followed by Corpus Christi.

(The Ascension and Corpus Christi typically occur on Thursdays, however, it is as the discretion of the Bishop to assign whether these feasts are celebrated on Thursday or Sunday, and this has much to do with the history of the region and whether or not these dates being Holy Days of **Obligation** would put undo burden on the laity to attend as it may interfere with their work week.)

Liturgical Calendar

The liturgical calendar is marked by the seasons and times just discussed, but it is peppered with what we refer generally to as “feast days,” as well as some other liturgical observations.

Feast days can be grouped (or ranked) into three categories: **memorials**, feasts, and solemnities.

The rank of memorial is for the majority of the saints. Some are considered obligatory memorials, and others are optional. This means that if the Mass is an obligatory memorial, *and* there are multiple options for Mass readings for the day, the memorial must be observed, whereas optional memorials have readings, but are not required. The “Gloria” is not said these days.

The rank of feast is largely reserved for the Apostles. These feasts do not have a vigil, and we recite the Creed at Masses on these days, but not the “Gloria.”

The rank of **solemnity** is reserved for the celebration of the events of Christ’s earthly life, some of the Marian feast days, and for a few saints as well as All Saints Day and Corpus Christi. All Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation are considered Solemnities. The celebration of a solemnity begins the evening before, either at first Vespers (Vespers are evening prayers from the Liturgy of the Hours) or with a Vigil Mass. The Creed and Gloria are said at Masses for these celebrations.

The Church uses a 3-year cycle of readings that are labeled as “Monday of the first week in Ordinary time,” or “Fourth Sunday of Advent,” for example, and they will be from

cycle A, B, or C for Sundays, and A or B for weekdays. This means that the same readings do not always occur on the same date each year. Though the readings for a given date may vary from year to year, if the date is an obligatory memorial, feast, or solemnity, those readings will always be read on that date, *unless* it falls on a Sunday, in which case, the readings for Sunday take precedence.

We celebrate the lives of the saints in order to remember the example of holiness they have given, and we do well to befriend the saints, because they are powerful, heavenly intercessors. There is an endless list of saints with whom we can befriend! Nearly every feast day or memorial is an anniversary of their death... a celebration of that saint’s “birthday into heaven,” though sometimes we may remember something such as the “translation” (moving) of their relics. There are just three earthly birthdays that the Church observes, the nativities of Jesus, Mary, and St. John the Baptist.

Because there are so many feast days we could celebrate, it is not practical to observe them all! Later we will look at how you can cultivate a list of saintly friends for your family, and you will find a list of feast days that make a good starting point if you are new to all of this.

2.

Relationship

A vital thing to remember about liturgical living is that the point of it is not to check off some celebratory to-do list, but to deepen our relationship with the Blessed Trinity and our understanding of **communion** with Christ as well as all believers, past, present, and future.

When we celebrate a feast day, we don't just make a special dessert or roast for the sake of tradition, but for *sharing it with others*. We don't acknowledge the saints so that we can have a fun craft or activity to do, we do it as a reminder that these people are our family and because of the example they set. Whether you are single, married, or have children, when we celebrate feast days, we don't *actually* do it alone, even if nobody else is physically present with us... we do it in communion with anyone else who has ever or will ever observe that day.

As we grow in our understanding of our place in the **Mystical** Body of Christ, we grow in our understanding of God. The whole point of life is love and communion! But aside from feast days, there are some very foundational things we can do to grow in our relationship with God. Prayer is an integral part of that.

Simply put, to pray means to ask. When we “pray to the saints” it is not a form of worship, but rather we implore their intercession and help in matters of our lives, like we ask for assistance or prayers from family and friends. (When we ask the saints for their assistance, we recognize that they offer us no help but through God's grace!) Typically, however, when we think of the term “prayer,” it is in reference to God. When we pray to God, we might ask for something, but it's also just a time to talk to Him... prayer in this sense is conversation with God.

There are many different forms of prayer, some of which we'll explore in a bit, but we can categorize them to some degree. There are **rote** prayers- the prayers we memorize, such as the Meal Prayer or the Our Father. These prayers help us to “show up,” a reminder to be present to God, and an aide at times when we have no words of our own. They also create a deeper sense of unity when we say these prayers with others. It is an incredibly powerful thing to be able to pray in perfect unison with another, especially if you've never met before, and that is a gift Catholics throughout the world share.

Meditative or contemplative prayer, such as the rosary and Adoration are times when we sit with God to dwell in His presence and are especially open to what He wants to show or tell us. There are multiple ways to pray the rosary but the most common and recommended way is to pray the different mysteries, which allow us to meditate on the life of Christ. Even in the more “Mary-focused” Glorious Mysteries when we meditate on the

Assumption and Coronation of Mary, we are actually contemplating the effects of a life totally devoted to God.

Spontaneous prayer is a conversation with God that does not follow a formula, and might happen when you pray with a friend when they are going through a hard time, or when you are sharing your day with God, your joys, fears, and needs, and thanking Him for the various things in your life. Ejaculatory prayers are those little prayers we cry out to God in moments of joy, fear, frustration, and more. Some examples are phrases such as “Praise be to God!” or “Lord, help me!” In spontaneous prayer, we simply pour out their hearts and minds to God. Plenty of people talk to themselves as they sort through tasks to be done, and we can just as easily direct that to God. Your heavenly Father is with you always... Do you talk to Him?

Prayer at Home

While liturgical living begins with our life at Mas, it should permeate our lives, beginning at home. It should especially be practiced in our homes and with our families. (This is what is referred to as the “**domestic church**.”) Whether you are single or married, have children or not, your home is a place for you and others to encounter and grow closer to God, and it begins with prayer. When prayer doesn’t feel natural to a family, incorporating rote prayers throughout our day is a good way to begin. It helps us to build the habit since there are always words available to us, and promotes unity, both in the home and when

you then pray these prayers with other Catholics at home or elsewhere.

Many families who are **nominally** Catholic, but want to deepen their faith life don’t know where to begin and feel overwhelmed by the sheer amount of things they don’t know. A great place to start is with “Grace” before meals, the most common version being, “Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which we are about to receive, from Thy bounty, through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.” This is a great one to learn, since so many Catholics know it, and you can pray it in unison when gathered for a meal. It has the added benefit of being easy to memorize.

If praying with guests before a meal, it can be good to say a quick additional prayer before or after Grace, thanking God for their presence with you. If you are praying with your children, it is good to thank God for the people who helped bring the meal to your table (from the farmer to the truck driver to the grocery store workers to the cook) as it reminds them (and us) that our food doesn’t magically arrive at our tables, but comes to us through the blessings of others. It is an excellent practice for growth in gratitude and helps to illustrate how dependent we are on others.

The other times that are common for adding prayer are at the start and close of the day, while the family is gathered for breakfast in the morning and before everyone shuffles off to bed at night. If starting with both feels overwhelming, then just begin with one. After you get comfortable with one, you can incorporate the other. There are morning prayers (such as in the Liturgy of the

Hours or the Morning Offertory), but you really can begin your day with any prayer. The Our Father is a great way to start your day as we ask God for our “daily bread” which is not simply a request for food to sustain us throughout the day. It ultimately refers to the Eucharist, but also the support we need throughout the day, spiritually and otherwise.

There *are* rote prayers that Catholics are generally expected to know, and if you have children or grandchildren in religious formation, they will need support in learning these prayers. Praying these prayers together as a family is a great way to learn them. If you have little ones at home, nighttime is a great time to pray the Glory Be, the Guardian Angel prayer, and the St. Michael prayer as they remind us of the defense and protection we have from God. As an adult, if you are looking for something more to pray, the Night Office from the Liturgy of the Hours takes about 10 minutes and can be prayed anytime before you go to sleep. It also provides the added benefit of encouraging you to spend a few moments reflecting as you do a nightly examination of conscience. This is especially good for helping to change patterns of behavior and preparing us for regular confessions.

“5 Alive”

If you live in the Diocese of Green Bay, you may have heard Bishop David Ricken promoting the “5 Alive” practices of our Catholic faith: Mass, Confession, Adoration, **Lectio Divina**,

and the Rosary. Each of these are forms of prayer which are so beneficial to our faith life.

Yes... each of those items listed is a form of prayer! Lectio Divina (which translates literally to “divine reading”) is a way of reading Sacred Scripture, in which we meditate on a passage or a reading, reading it several times and pausing to listen to what God is telling us through this passage. Anytime we read God’s Word, it is a form of prayer, whether we realize it or not, because through it, we hear Him speak. (Prayer is not a one-sided conversation, though many people feel that way!) Being focused and intentional in our reading bears great fruit in our lives!

Confession is also a form of prayer, in which we confess to God through a priest who sits in “persona Christi” with us. We can prepare well for this sacrament with God’s aid (a practice which becomes easier if we do a nightly examination of conscience). In doing so, we remember any ways in which we have failed to live out charity (love) towards ourselves, others, and God. The Holy Spirit guides us through this practice and stirs our conscience. Jesus sits with us as we confess, and through Christ, we receive absolution and the graces that pour out from the Father. Confession does not only have to happen once a year, nor is it strictly reserved for the confessing of mortal sin. Confession on a regular basis helps us to keep a pulse on the areas we need work on virtue in our lives so that we can love more completely.

Though most people would recognize the Rosary as a prayer, many protestants and some Catholics make the mistake of thinking that the rosary is about Mary. In reality, Mary guides us through the mysteries of the life of her Son, and all but two of the mysteries come directly from Scripture. The rosary is meant to be meditative in nature, though there are many different ways in which it can be prayed.

In Holy Mass, we receive God into us, *bodily*! We digest His Word, and then His very Presence. There could not be a more intimate form of relationship. And we are not limited to receiving the Eucharist on Sunday mornings alone! Most parishes offer at least one weekday Mass, with many offering more than one. If your own parish has only one Mass available, there is a chance that a neighboring parish will have different weekday Mass times. Though going during the week is often not possible or is quite difficult for people, it *is* a wonderful way to grow closer to Our Lord. It is also a great time to learn more about the liturgical seasons and to honor any favored saints or liturgical observations (such as the Rogation Days).

Finally, in Adoration, we sit face to face with our Holy Lord. As one of St. John Vianney's parishioners once said about Adoration, "I look at Him, and He looks at me." In Adoration, we can sit with the Lord and just be in His presence, often with no distractions. We can simply sit and listen, or we can bring our pains and sorrows. We can bring our joy and our struggles, too. Many Catholic writers will bring their work to God to ask for His

inspiration and His blessing, and lots of people sit in discernment over their vocation in His presence.

It is not uncommon for people to feel awkward or uncomfortable the first time or two that they go to Adoration, as they feel they ought to be "doing something." In Mass, we stand and kneel and sit and sing and pray and listen, whereas Adoration is very still and quiet by comparison. (You do not need to kneel or sit completely still the whole time. You can read the Bible, the daily readings, or a theological or spiritual writing, pray the rosary or any other prayers that come to mind, and we can journal or write or even work on something that we need His assistance on.)

Sometimes we'll be in Adoration alone, and sometimes in the presence of others. If you are with others, it is polite for those present to stay relatively still and quiet so that you do not disturb their time with Our Lord, just as it is polite to enter and exit the church quietly before and after Mass so that the prayers of others are not being disturbed.

Whichever of these practices you take up or increase, at home or in a church building, the intent behind it is the same: to grow in relationship with God. These practices are the ultimate form of liturgical living!

3.

Penitential Times

Penance is an act of reparation for sins. There are three traditional forms of penance: prayer, **fasting**, and almsgiving. Prayer can be focused on anything. Often when it is done for penitential reasons it is focused on those whom we have harmed through our sinful behaviors. In other words, if I have harmed my sister, I will pray for her good. Almsgiving is not strictly related to the giving of money, though that's what we primarily think of. Almsgiving can be any kind of donation (such as giving food to a food pantry) or act of service (volunteering your time in some way).

Fasting is the practice of refraining from eating for a set period of time during the day. Many people make the mistake of thinking that fasting means no eating at all, but it's really just limited eating... smaller portions, fewer meals, and within a shorter time frame than normal. There have *always* been exceptions to the practice of fasting. The elderly, the sick, pregnant or nursing women, and those under the age of 18 are not expected to fast. Work that is very physically intensive may also impact what is expected of a person. Speak to your priest or spiritual director if you have questions. Today there are only two days required of Catholics for fasting, Ash Wednesday and Good

Friday, though it is encouraged we take up the practice voluntarily at other times throughout the year.

Fasting is often confused with abstinence, which is voluntarily refraining from a particular item, activity, or behavior for an extended period of time. Typically, in a Catholic context, it refers to refraining from meat, because it is what we are all expected to refrain from during Fridays in Lent, though we might voluntarily **abstain** from things like chocolate or television.

Advent and Lent are the penitential seasons that precede Christmas and Easter respectively. Advent lasts about four weeks, though it varies a bit in length from year to year. Most people consider Advent to be from December 1st until December 25th, but Advent technically starts four Sundays before Christmas Day, and it can begin as late as December 3rd. Lent lasts for forty days, *not counting Sundays*, and ends before Easter. Though these are penitential seasons and penance is integral to these seasons, it is helpful to remember that they are seasons of waiting and *preparation*.

Advent

During Advent, we focus on the coming of Christ, and this coming happens in three ways. The first way is to remember the first coming, when God became **incarnate**, when Jesus was born in the stable in Bethlehem. The second coming is His second coming, the coming that He foretold in the Gospels. And lastly,

the third coming is the one that happens right here and now in our hearts, in the ways we welcome Christ into our lives.

We often think of penance as something sad and dreary. Yes, penance is a way to make reparation for sin, and it is true that we should feel sorrow for our sins, true contrition, for all of the ways we fail to love. But just think about what we are waiting for during Advent! If you have children of your own, you know with what emotion you awaited the birth of your child. It might come with some concerns and anxieties, but you also probably felt great joy, excitement, and anticipation! You probably had days when you longed for the wait to be over because the waiting was painful and days when you longed for it to end because you just wanted to hold your beloved child. (That's the kind of longing we should feel as we await Christ's coming.)

Through those emotions, you probably prepared. Maybe you took childbirth classes or painted a nursery, or washed blankets and clothing from your previous children. Most mothers spend the last few weeks "nesting," preparing their homes for this new little child. And if you have multiple children, then you were probably more concerned than ever with getting things in order, because you knew how difficult it would be to get things done after the baby made his or her arrival! There comes a sense of urgency as the due date draws near and the reality of the impending change settles in. *That* is how we should consider the season of Advent!

Advent isn't the time for celebrating, it's the time for preparation! Society has pushed the celebration of Christmas to the start of Advent, but they are two entirely different seasons! Today, most people consider the day after Thanksgiving as the beginning of the Christmas season, but the Christmas season actually begins on December 24th at the Vigil Mass! We've intertwined our seasons of preparation and celebration, and it has dampened the appreciation and understanding of each. What if we remembered that the infant Jesus hasn't come just yet (at least, liturgically speaking)? And what if we remembered that His second coming *will happen*, but it hasn't yet? There is still time to prepare... How will we prepare? What things still need to be set right? When we approach Advent with this kind of mindset, it dramatically impacts the way we experience the season.

Lent

Lent is similar, though instead of preparing for a birth, we prepare for a death. Of course, we remember Christ's passion and death throughout Lent, but it's also a time to remember our own death. During Lent, we allow ourselves to be crucified... we unite our sufferings with Christ, we nail our sinful habits and earthly desires to the cross, to more fully unite ourselves to Him in the Resurrection. As Catholics, we pray for a "good death," meaning that we pass from this life to the next having reconciled ourselves with God and with others, we are in a state of grace, and have hope and faith of salvation... that we persevere in faith until the

very end. How we die isn't strictly relegated to our final moments, but is affected by how we live our lives in the little day-to-day details as well as the big things in life. We may or may not suffer in our final moments, but if we do, how we suffer is a part of that "good death."

During Lent, the little mortifications and penances we practice help prepare us for our final moments. We examine our lives during this time and hopefully, make a good confession. Those final days before the Resurrection (the Triduum) we might step things up a notch in order to meditate more deeply on Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection.

Fridays

It seems that few people realize that every Friday throughout the year, with the exception of the Friday during the octave of Easter, are penitential days. Most Catholics are familiar with Fridays during Lent being a time of abstinence, but it has always been recommended to be a year-round observation, not just reserved for Lent. In fact, this is still something we should do, and if we are unable to, then the recommendation is to take up another form of penance. It was not long ago that Catholics were to abstain from meat on Fridays under the pain of sin (meaning it was considered a sin to eat meat on Fridays), but the requirement was lifted in 1966. The bishops however, always maintained that we should keep Friday as a day of penitence and mortification.

Vigils, Ember Days, and Rogation Days

Vigils are the day before any of the solemnities of the Church and have historically been days of fasting and abstinence. Ember Days are sets of days that occur quarterly throughout the year to mark the changing of the natural seasons, and they too, have been days for fasting and abstinence. Today, both are optional observances (in that we are not required to fast or abstain), but it is still most definitely encouraged for the faithful to not only acknowledge these days, but the penitential nature of these days and the preparational work that they do... In Vigils, we are preparing our hearts and minds for the coming celebrations, and during the Ember Days, we are preparing for the coming seasons and the harvests that they will provide for the benefit of the whole Church.

The Ember Days mark the changing of the natural seasons of the world, from winter to spring to summer and finally, to autumn. (The term "ember" is the corrupted version of the Latin phrase "*Quatuor Tempora*," meaning, "four times".) Each season has a particular harvest for which we pray. In winter we pray for the olive harvest, which becomes the oils of anointing for sacramental use. Spring is for the flowers, which provide food for the bees who make the wax that is used to make candles for our use in worship and prayer. At the summer Ember Days, we pray for the harvest of wheat, which will become the Body of Christ, and the autumn days are a time to pray for the sacramental wine, which becomes the Blood of Christ.

Each element plays an important role in the life of the Church, but these things are also important in our day-to-day lives outside of the setting of the Mass. Each season has three Ember Days, and all take place on the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday after a particular liturgical observation. The winter dates take place after the feast of St. Lucy on December 13th, spring after Ash Wednesday, the summer days begin after the feast of Pentecost, and the autumn days after the Exultation of the Holy Cross on September 14th.

The Ember Days are also a time when the Church prays particularly for vocations to the priesthood as they are, in the words of Christ, “laborers for the harvest.” Ember Saturdays have long been a traditional time for priestly ordinations (though they are not the only times ordinations can occur).

Rogation Days are another penitential time during the year, and they take place roughly before planting season begins, and are a time of supplication for the growing season and harvest. There are a total of four Rogation Days. The Major Rogation Day is on April 25th each year, which is more commonly recognized or observed as the feast of St. Mark the Evangelist, writer of the Book of Mark, whose memorial falls on the same date. The Minor Rogation Days occur on the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before Ascension Thursday, or if the feast of the Ascension is moved to the following Sunday according to the local Bishop’s instructions, then it would be observed the Thursday, Friday, and Saturday prior.

Throughout these days, we pray for the people working the land (farmers and gardeners), the weather, the harvest, the animals, trees, and even the equipment used. On these days, people have traditionally attended Mass and held processions around the parish boundaries, though today many who observe this tradition simply process around their land. These days of penitence began during a time of great distress for the people of what is now modern-day France. Disease, pestilence, natural disaster, and war were affecting the area, and the days began as a time of supplication to God, asking for His mercy and protection. The tradition continued and grew throughout the centuries, expanding to the whole Church mostly falling out of common practice after changes to the General Roman Calendar were made in the 1960s. (They are growing in popularity among families who homestead, farm, and garden.)

Throughout these various seasons and days of penitence, while abstaining from meat and fasting are good things we can do to draw our attention to God and to mortify the flesh, remember that we can practice penitence in other ways as well! Almsgiving can take place in whatever way we feel called, and prayer is vitally important at all times and can and should always be done in conjunction with any fasting or abstinence.

4.

Celebratory Times

While we observe penitential times partly to make reparations for our sins, to help us meditate on Christ's life, passion, death, and resurrection, and partly to help us detach from sin, these more sober times are not meant to make life gloomy, nor does the Church expect us to live without joy! This life God has given us is beautiful and worth celebrating and we should give thanks to God. (We have such an abundance of things we can celebrate that the penitential times serve to keep us in check and be moderate in our actions.) For lots of people, when they hear the term "liturgical living," *this* is what they think of: the celebratory nature of the Church. They think of time with friends or family, big meals, special desserts, fun activities, and hopefully, they are also thinking about *what* we celebrate and *why*!

The traditions or customs that we keep in relation to the feast days can be a great tool for catechizing our children and grandchildren (and for educating ourselves as well)! A tradition doesn't mean much, however, if we forget why we do it in the first place. It is all well and good to make a particular type of cookie for a particular feast day every year, and maybe we make them simply because we enjoy them. If that's the case, then it is *really* important that we don't make the mistake of thinking we

have to bake (or purchase) them every year. If baking the cookies is going to rob us of our joy or make us cranky with others, then we've missed the point of why we are celebrating.

Now, none of these little traditions are requirements, really, but some traditions are more meaningful than others. To go back to the cookie example, it's traditional to make horseshoe cookies for the feast of St. Martin of Tours (Nov. 11th). These are almond cookies, shaped like a horseshoe and dusted with powdered sugar, served on his feast day. St. Martin was a Roman soldier, who, while riding into a city on his horse on a cold and snowy day, cut his cloak in half to clothe a poor, naked beggar sitting outside of the city gate. Cutting his cloak (the property of the military) was a risky move on St. Martin's part. He had a dream that night of Jesus clothed in that half-cloak, a reminder of Christ's admonition to "clothe the naked." That horseshoe cookie isn't just a cookie, it's a reminder of one of the most well-known stories of this saint, of his incredible generosity, and that we are *all* called to live the Corporal **Works of Mercy**. Are the cookies necessary? No. But they do have value as an educational tool.

Now, a large feast for a feast day may not be necessary, and yes, it may cause a little extra work to prepare, but the purpose of these feasts is to draw people together in a shared meal, a *communion*. That is something we all benefit from, as we need to live more and more each day like the Blessed Trinity-love, flowing from one person to the next.

Holy Days of Obligation

As we make plans for what feast days to celebrate, we should give pride of place to Sundays and the other Holy Days of Obligation. Every Sunday is, in fact, a **Holy Day of Obligation**, because every Sunday is a “mini-Easter,” where we revisit the events of the Resurrection (this is why Sundays are not a part of the 40 days of Lent). Sundays are meant to be set apart, different from the rest of the week. Just a few decades ago, it was rare to find a store or even a gas station open on a Sunday, as it was a day set apart for attending services, visiting with friends, family, or neighbors, spending time resting and in the company of our own families. Today, the number of stores open is continually growing, and families are more actively running from activity to activity, such as sporting events and recitals on Sundays.

In the United States, there are six Holy Days of Obligation: Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God (Jan. 1st), Ascension (Thursday of the sixth week of Easter), Assumption (Aug. 15th), All Saints (Nov. 1st), **Immaculate Conception** (December 8th), and Christmas (Dec. 25th). Since Easter always lands on a Sunday, it is not listed, as all Sundays are considered Holy Days. The solemnity of the Ascension can be transferred to the seventh Sunday of Easter, according to the decree of the bishop. The solemnities of Mary, Mother of God, the Assumption, and All Saints Day do not require attendance *if* they land on a Saturday or a Monday, though the faithful *are* encouraged to attend Mass if possible.

Reclaiming Catholic Feast Days

If you’d like to increase your observance of Catholic feast days, a very easy place to start is by reclaiming a few very popular feast days that have become very secularized throughout recent history in particular. For starters, there are Christmas and Easter! The celebration of Christmas has been pushed earlier and earlier over the past few decades. Our celebration no longer begins with a vigil Mass on Christmas Eve, but rather, begins as soon as we’ve finished cleaning up from our Thanksgiving dinners (and sometimes sooner)! Yes, it is true that the Incarnation (God became flesh and dwelt among us) is of incredible importance and *does* deserve to be celebrated well and for an extended period of time. However, it is so easy to overlook what we are really celebrating when we mix the celebration with the season of preparation. Ecclesiastes 3:1 reminds us that “there is a time for everything and a season for everything under the heavens.” True, we won’t just suddenly change the culture and expectations around us, but we can make small changes in our own lives that may have an impact on the world around us.

Contrary to common belief, the twelve days of Christmas do *not* begin eleven days before Christmas and conclude with Christmas day, but rather that they begin *on* Christmas Day (technically, with the vigil Mass on Christmas Eve) and conclude with the feast of the Epiphany, the memorial of the visit of the wisemen. Throughout those days, in addition to celebrating the Incarnation, we remember St. Stephen, the first martyr, the Holy

Innocents (the children massacred at the decree of King Herod), the Holy Family, the feast of Mary, the Mother of God, and the feast of the Epiphany. (The hymn “We Three Kings” is for the Epiphany, not Advent, and the song “The 12 Days of Christmas” is not actually about birds and maids-a-milking, nor is it meant for the season of Advent!)

But arguably more important than when we celebrate is *how* we celebrate. Is Jesus just a nice background figure to our various celebrations, or is He at the center? Is he eclipsed by mythical characters and consumerism? The same can be said of Easter, the *vital*ly important time when we celebrate Christ’s Resurrection! The Resurrection is what our faith in Christ hinges on. Without it, Jesus would have been a fraud. The Resurrection is pivotal to our faith as Christians, and it deserves to be celebrated in a big way! The Easter Vigil Mass is the most beautiful Mass of the year and if you’ve never witnessed an adult getting baptized or receiving the Eucharist for the first time, it is such a moving experience! Yes, it is long and it is late, but it’s only one night, and if there is a night to stay up late, this is it!

Did you know that the tradition of decorating eggs for Easter began because of Mary Magdalene? As the story goes, she was telling the emperor about Jesus’ resurrection, using an egg to explain the empty tomb. The emperor said, “He no more rose from the dead than the egg in your hand is red!” and at these words, the egg turned red! Easter baskets began as a tradition of bringing the Easter breakfast to Mass in a basket to be blessed by

the priest before the Easter vigil. It would be filled with bread, meat, butter, eggs and sweets.

There are other feast days (four in particular) that are popular to a large portion of secular society, and it has obscured the importance of what these days are really about. They are St. Valentine’s Day, St. Patrick’s Day, Halloween, and St. Nicholas’ Day. St. Valentine’s has become all about romantic love, chocolate, roses, and jewelry, St. Patrick’s has become about drinking, leprechauns, and wearing green, Halloween has become about horror and celebrating evil, and St. Nicholas has morphed into Santa and presents. If there is a way we can make a shift in the world around us, it is in how we observe these feasts. Catholics have a long history of baptizing traditions from other religions in order to take what is good (or neutral) and redirect the use of those things towards the one true God. We have the opportunity to return these celebrations to God and teach others the true purpose and meaning in the process.

St. Valentine was a priest (possibly a bishop) from Rome during the 3rd century. For a long time, Roman soldiers were not allowed to be married, but Valentine officiated marriages of Christian soldiers in secret, despite the decree, which is why he is associated with romantic love. However, the story that brings us the tradition of giving “Valentine’s” comes from the story of his role in healing the blind daughter of a judge. The girl was healed, and her father converted. Valentine was ordered to be executed for refusing to renounce his Christian faith, and the story tells that

before his execution, he wrote a letter to this girl, and signed it “Your Valentine.” While we can certainly celebrate marriage and romantic love on St. Valentine’s we should also remember the witness to the faith that he left for us!

In Chicago on St. Patrick’s Day, the city famously dyes the river green each year. Bars are full throughout the day, and leprechauns’, pots of gold, and shamrocks are everywhere to be seen. This is *such* a disservice to St. Patrick! Patrick was an incredible saint! True, the green is representative of Ireland, where Patrick spent a good deal of his life, but it is also a reminder of the eternal life we receive through Christ. Patrick was not originally from Ireland. He was kidnapped and taken there to work as a slave. He escaped after several years, but after returning home, he felt God calling him to go back to Ireland to convert the people there, which he did! His love for Ireland is why Ireland is so heavily tied to the feast day. The shamrock we see isn’t a symbol for this day because it’s “lucky,” it’s used because he used it as a tool to help illustrate the Trinity to the people he was converting to the faith. And though it is true that Catholics have some pretty deep ties to the production and consumption of alcohol, drunkenness has never been encouraged!

Another holy day that has been secularized? Halloween. Yes, Halloween! The word “Halloween” comes from the name of the day, All Hallow’s Evening, or Hallow-e’en. Today All Hallow’s Day is called All Saint’s Day (hallow meaning “holy,” and saint meaning “sanctified” or holy). Halloween is part of a

mini-season called Hallowtide, where we observe the Eve, All Saints Day, and All Souls Day. Making a point to celebrate all three is a great way to reclaim this time.

Many Christians recoil at this holiday because of the obsession with the occult that has crept in over time, and in truth, we would be wise to be cautious and aware of some of the things that have latched onto this holy day, but the history of this day is actually quite fascinating and it is worthy of observance. Since All Saint’s Day is a Holy Day of Obligation, there is a vigil observed (Halloween). Jack-o-lanterns are vigil lights (if you’ve been to Easter vigil, then you know about vigil candles)!

Skulls and the macabre are not a part of Halloween for the reason most people think. (True, things have gone too far, with a focus and even celebration of evil, and we should avoid glorifying those things.) Skulls have been portrayed in Christian art as a reminder of our mortality and what comes after death. There is a Latin phrase used by Catholics, “Memento Mori,” which means “remember your death.” It’s not an obsession with death or glorification of death, but a somber reminder that we all die, and our actions in this life affect what happens in the next.

All Hallows Day or All Saints Day is a time for us to reflect on the lives of all of the holy men and women who have gone on to be in heaven with God. When we study depictions of the saints, some are quite shocking if we are unfamiliar with Catholic art or the stories of martyrdom. St. Bartholomew was skinned alive and he is sometimes depicted with a bloody body,

holding his skin. St. Lucy had her eyes plucked out, and she is depicted holding her eyeballs on a platter. St. Lawrence was grilled alive and is depicted being burnt alive. (He is reported to have said to his executioners “I’m done on this side, flip me over!”) St. Barbara had her breasts cut off as part of her torture for refusing to renounce her Christian faith, and she is sometimes depicted with a bloody chest or holding her breasts on a platter. St. Peter of Verona is depicted with a sword in his head with blood dripping down and a sword in his chest to illustrate the means of his martyrdom.

We don’t put these images in icons and stained glass windows because we’re obsessed with death, but to remind us that death is not the end, that through death, these holy men and women were brought to heavenly glory. They are a reminder of what it might cost to stand firmly for our faith, and their example can give us courage to stand for Christ in the little things in life. The depiction of the macabre associated with Halloween didn’t begin as a way to celebrate evil, but to mock Satan and the enemy because Christ conquers death. During the Byzantine celebration of Pascha (Easter), they sing “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and on those in the tomb bestowing life!” (If we want to decorate with skeletons and embrace the gore, then it ought be with the saints and Christ in mind!)

Trick-or-Treating began as a tradition called “Souling,” when people would travel from house to house begging for “Soul

cakes” (a sweet bread/treat) and would offer to pray for the departed family members of those they visited. The use of decorative tomb stones actually points us back to the tradition of visiting cemeteries to pray for the souls of the departed. We should be on the lookout for the evil and the occult that have slipped in through secular means and be sure not to partake in anything contrary to our faith.

And finally, there is the feast of St. Nicholas. This feast is not celebrated everywhere, but is commonly observed in areas with a strong German heritage throughout the United States. St. Nicholas was the bishop of Myra (which is in modern-day Turkey). He was of Greek descent and lived during the 3rd and 4th centuries.

The observation of his feast day is largely observed in cultural pockets, but nearly everybody knows him as Santa Claus. (Santa means Saint, and Claus is a form of Nicholas.) His story has morphed dramatically throughout time, becoming legend, including a sleigh and flying reindeer. Nicholas *was* generous and a miracle-worker, but he has never been purported to have flown in any capacity (though some saints have levitated, such as St. Joseph Cupertino or bi-located, such as St. Padre Pio).

There are multiple stories that have passed down about his life involving gift-giving and miracles. In one, he gave a pouch of gold coins to some girls for their dowry. Since they were so poor, there was a great risk they may be forced into prostitution. Under the cover of night, Nicholas left a pouch of gold through the

window of the house for each of the girls over the course of several nights. Some versions of the story say that the girls had shoes by the window or stockings hanging to dry that the gold was left inside of, which is where the tradition of leaving little gifts in stockings or shoes comes from.

He is also said to have resurrected three boys who were murdered during a time of famine by a butcher who intended to sell them as pork, and stored them in a pickling barrel. Nicholas discovered this and prayed over the barrel with the sign of the cross, restoring the boys to life. Stockings, chocolate gold coins, oranges (a representation of gold), and pickle ornaments are all used around the time of his feast to point back to Nicholas and his incredible faith.

The classic red and white colors and dress we see today are a morphing of his attire as a bishop. He would have worn a miter (the pointy hat) and not the stocking cap we see today. His vestments are often portrayed as being red, and the white trim may have been a pallium, orphrey, or omophorion, signs of his ecclesial authority. His feast has become entangled with the celebration of Christmas because it occurs a few weeks before Christmas. True, these stories may contain some details we might not be eager to share with young children, but we can still teach them the truth about this great saint, exposing them to more of the details as they get older. The gift-giving associated with St. Nicholas is a reminder of his generosity and a symbol of God's love. His life was a great witness of Christian charity!

Saints for Your Family

The list of saints is truly endless. We know that not everyone in heaven has been officially canonized or declared a saint, but even for those who have been, it's a lengthy list! If you don't already know much about the saints and are trying to figure out how to start, a good place to begin is by choosing things that relate to your family and make a connection with a saint. The internet is a handy reference tool that will allow you to search in a variety of ways, but you can also get a copy of the "Roman Martyrology," "The Golden Legend," or one of the many different copies of books with collections of saints and their biographies. (You can sometimes find them in St. Vincent de Paul thrift stores.)

One of the first places we can look for inspiration is with the things tied to our identity: name days, birthdays, and sacramental anniversaries. Some of us were named for saints, others were not. (Did you know that the Catholic Church has something to say about naming children? Check out paragraphs 2156-2159 of the catechism to learn more.) Even if we weren't intentionally named for a saint, oftentimes, we can find a saint who shares one of our names (first, middle, or last), or who has the masculine or feminine version of our name. (Mario is the masculine for Maria/Mary. Michelle is the feminine of Michael.) Once we know the memorial of such a saint exists, we can observe and celebrate it! To see if you share a name with a saint, check the table of contents or the index in the back of a book of

saints, or use a website like catholic.org/saints. Many Catholics observe their “Name Day,” by honoring the saint with whom they share a name.

Birthdays, likewise, can offer inspiration. A quick search online for a saint whose feast day is on your birthdate can provide a meaningful connection to the saints. It is not uncommon for a Catholic to name their child for a saint whose feast day is the date the child was born.

We can look to the sacraments, too! On what day did you receive your First Eucharist? When were you baptized? Do you know when your First Reconciliation occurred? Then there’s your marriage anniversary! Look up the dates of these events, and find a saint for the day. If you were confirmed, do you remember which saint name you took? If you do not know the dates of these events, you can contact the parish where you received them and ask for some of this information.

And if you don’t already, you can celebrate not just the saints associated with the dates of your reception of the sacraments, but also the sacraments themselves! Though nearly everyone would celebrate their anniversary in some capacity, we can celebrate the other sacraments, too. Baptismal anniversaries are a common one to celebrate since this marks the date that we became adopted sons or daughters of God. Our First Eucharist (also called our First Communion) is really important, as it is the first time we “sit at table” with the rest of our adopted family, the first time Jesus comes to us physically, and it is worthy of

observance, too! For those who entered the Church or received the remaining sacraments as an adult, you likely did so at Easter Vigil, so you already celebrate each year!

Cultural, Occupational, Hobbies, and Struggles

There are still other ways we can make connections to the saints! One common way is looking up saints by patronage. Some are formally declared a patron of a particular profession or cause, and others simply have ties to these things and have been unofficially recognized. Another way to find saints is by cultural association. Some cultures have special connections with a particular saint for one reason or another, and they might have special ways of celebrating these feasts.

For cultural connections, if you don’t already have something you are familiar with, you can look to the heritage of your family. In Ireland, St. Patrick is incredibly popular, but so is St. Brigid of Kildare. St. Boniface is the patron saint of Germany, and St. Hildegard has long been a favorite there. Though she was largely only recognized regionally as a saint, she received an “equivalent canonization” from Pope Benedict XVI in 2012. In Mexico, St. Juan Deigo and Our Lady of Guadalupe are especially honored. If Adele Brise of Champion, WI is canonized, chances are she’ll be especially honored in the United States, but particularly in the Diocese of Green Bay.

As for special celebrations, in Italy, there are towns that celebrate “San Giuseppe” (St. Joseph) with particular customs,

such as a large bonfire or a special meal where the town sets up tables in the streets and they all gather to share a meal with their regional dishes.

If you would like to find a patron for a particular occupation or hobby, you can search online for “Patron saint of ____” (seamstresses, blacksmiths, computer engineers, doctors, artists...). Maybe we don’t have a huge celebration for their feast days, but we might call on them for their intercession in our daily life or during our labors, or we might make a point of attending Mass for their memorial.

Sometimes we have a particular struggle in life that we could use additional help with. St. Anthony is famously the “finder of lost things,” St. Peregrine is the patron of cancer patients, St. Dymphna is patron of mental health...

There is no required way for us to celebrate feast days (other than our obligation to attend Mass for Holy Days of Obligation), and so we can get as involved as we want. If you find that your family does have a cultural association with a particular feast, and there is a special type of feast that is traditionally held, you are *not* obligated to observe it at all or in the same way that it is elsewhere. If the feast is typically served with goose, but you are allergic to or just don’t like or don’t have access to goose, that’s okay! The point of celebrating feast days is not the meal or some activity, but to remember those who have gone before us in faith, to celebrate their witness and communion with God, and to learn more about Christ through the example of their Christian

witness. The point is to unite ourselves with the communion of saints who are the Bride of Christ and part of the Mystical Body of Christ!

5.

Welcoming Jesus

Regular Sunday Mass attendance (or weekday Mass), daily prayer, and penitential and celebratory times make up the bulk of liturgical living, but there are still other things we can do to welcome Jesus into our lives, from the way we decorate our homes to the media we consume all the way to our attachment with a particular ideology or political party. For the sake of brevity, we'll look here at how we welcome Jesus in our homes.

Catholics have a long history of the use of “sacramentals,” objects that “are sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments. They signify effects, particularly of a spiritual nature, which are obtained through the intercession of the Church. By them, men are disposed to receive the chief effect of the sacraments, and various occasions in life are rendered holy” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1667). These objects are things that are meant to turn our attention to God. They are typically brought by the faithful to a priest for blessing, or a priest may be invited to your home to impart the blessing there. Common items blessed by priests are rosaries, crucifixes, icons, water fonts, scapulars, medals, water, and even salt! It's also a common practice to invite the parish priest over to do a home blessing on a yearly basis.

Crucifixes are often hung above doors and beds to remind us of the **sacrifice** of Christ and the love of God. Pictures of saints throughout the home or in bedrooms remind us of lives lived for Christ. Holy water fonts are placed at doors and serve as a reminder of our baptismal promises. Palm leaves (from Palm Sunday) remind us of Jesus' Passion. And sacred art reminds us of the stories and realities of our faith.

These things are not a requirement to have in our homes. But if we do decorate our homes, then we should leave some room for Christ in how we decorate. There are Catholic gift stores you can support in person or sites you can visit online, but procuring various sacramentals and artwork can be expensive. Estate sales, antique stores, and thrift stores such as St. Vincent de Paul are places you can acquire some of these things for your home without having to spend a large sum of money. Sometimes families donate Catholic items to their parishes after a loved one passes away, and these things can be passed on to other families as well.

Another great way to invite Jesus in is by making a prayer space or home altar. This is a place to help focus your attention during times of prayer and it serves as a reminder to pray. (It does not have the same meaning or purpose as the altar at church! The altar at the parish is for the Sacrifice of Christ. A home altar is a place where we offer our sacrifice of prayer.) These prayer spaces are often decorated with the current liturgical color, and they may have a candle to symbolize the Light of Christ. Sometimes they

are decorated with flowers. They may have a statue or a picture of a favorite saint or of Mary, a place for your rosary, and a Bible or a Missal or maybe prayer cards. Often there is a crucifix on or near it.

The goal is not to make our homes as “Catholic” as possible, but to provide opportunities to turn our attention to Christ. From feast days to sacramentals, the question we should always be asking ourselves is, “Is Jesus welcome here?”

Ultimately, that’s the goal of all liturgical living... inviting God into our lives in ways big and small, in our daily lives and throughout the entire year. Our Catholic faith is rich and beautiful, full of depth and meaning and purpose. Through living intentionally for God, we more fully experience His great love for us!

Glossary

Abstain- to refrain oneself from doing or enjoying something

Advent- the seasoning preceding Christmas, the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event

Altar- a table for making offerings or sacrifices; the altar in a church is exclusively used for the Eucharistic sacrifice, home altars are for offering prayers

Church- a) the body of all Christian believers, past, present, and future, b) the structure of the Catholic faith, c) the building in which the faithful gather

Communion- literally “with union,” either in reference to the Eucharist/Host, or peaceful relations with another

Domestic church- a family of believers, typically contained within a single household

Eucharist- literally “Thanksgiving,” the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ under the appearance of bread and wine, sometimes referred to as Communion or a Host

Fasting- a period of restricted eating, with either partial or complete refrain of the consumption of food

Feast- a large meal, typically in celebration of something, a reference to any memorial of a saint, or the specific rank of celebration

Grace- a) the free and unmerited favor of God and bestowal of blessing, b) goodwill, c) a prayer said before a meal

Holy Day of Obligation- a day in which Catholics are required to attend Mass

Immaculate Conception- the doctrine that God preserved the Virgin Mary from the stain of original sin from the moment she was conceived, the feast commemorating Mary's conception on December 8th, a holy day of obligation

Incarnate- literally "into flesh," embodied in flesh, in human form, a term used to describe God becoming man

Laity- ordinary people as set apart from clergy (priests, bishops, etc.)

Lectio Divina- literally "divine reading," a method of studying Sacred Scripture, reading a particular Biblical passage several times in a row with periods of prayer and meditation in between

Lent- the penitential season preceding Easter, devoted to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in order to prepare for the Resurrection

Liturgy- a form to which Christian worship is conducted, sometimes defined as "the work of the people" used in a religious context, a way of sanctifying time

Martyr- a Christian martyr is a person who is killed for their religious beliefs, sometimes pressured to renounce their faith and killed for refusing to renounce their faith

Mass- the rite through which we receive the Eucharist, containing several portions, including the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, in some rites it is known by other names, such as the Divine Liturgy or Holy Qurbana

Memorial- in reference to the Eucharist, it is the making present of Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection, or a term used to describe the rank of a celebration for a saint

Mystical- a sense of spiritual mystery

Nominally- in name only (a nominal Catholic does not practice their faith consistently or at all, yet identifies with the term)

Obligation- a duty or commitment

Penance- a voluntary act of repentance for having done wrong (prayer, fasting, and almsgiving)

Rote- a mechanical or habitual repetition of something to be learned

Sacrifice- an act of slaughtering an animal or person or surrendering a possession as an offering to God: Jesus' life was a sacrifice; our prayers, suffering, and life can be offered as a sacrifice

Sanctify- to set apart or to make holy

Season- a distinct period of time throughout the liturgical year, the cycle of the Church year

Solemnity- a feast day of the highest rank

Tradition- the official teaching or passing down of the faith from the apostles to modern times, serving as a compliment to Scripture, or when used with a lower-case "t," a custom or practice handed down from generation to generation

Vestments- garments worn for liturgical use, particularly by priests and deacons

Vigil- the eve of a festival or holy day, a time of keeping awake to watch and pray

Works of Mercy- meritorious practices in the life of the Christian, *Corporal Works of Mercy*: feed the hungry, give drink

to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick, shelter the homeless,
visit the prisoner, bury the dead, give alms to the poor
Spiritual Works of Mercy: counsel the doubtful, instruct the
ignorant, admonish the sinner, comfort the sorrowful, forgive
injuries, bear wrongs patiently, pray for the living and the dead

Resources

www.vatican.va/ (The Vatican's website. Select the preferred language from the dropdown menu if English does not automatically appear. The entire Catechism and GIRM are available on the website, and any Papal documents, including Encyclicals, which are letters from the pope to the people.)

www.usccb.org (The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. You can find daily readings, the entire Catechism, the GIRM, and other guidance offered by our bishops on the site.)

www.gbdio.org (Diocese of Green Bay website. You can search for "Pastoral Letters" to read messages from the bishop. You can also find access to various resources throughout the diocese.)