

The Main Feastdays of the Liturgical Year

The liturgical year of the Catholic Church is an annual cycle of seasons and feastdays.

The liturgical year does not begin on January 1st but on the first Sunday of Advent.

Christmas, Easter and Pentecost are the three biggest feastdays of the liturgical year.

There are three types of feastdays of the Church:

Feastdays of the Lord, feastdays of Mary the Mother of God and feastdays of other saints.

The Main Feastdays of the Lord are:

Christmas (December 25).

The Epiphany of the Lord (normally January 6).

Easter Sunday (The Sunday following the first full moon in Spring).

Ascension (Forty days after Easter Sunday).

Pentecost (Fifty days after Easter Sunday).

Corpus Christi (Normally the second Thursday after Pentecost).

The Main Feastdays of Mary Mother of God are:

Feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8).

Candlemas, The Feast of Purification of the blessed Virgin Mary (February 2).

Annunciation (March 25).

Assumption of Mary (August 15).

Nativity of Mary, (September 8).

Some of the More Important Feastdays of Other Saints are:

St. Stephen (December 26).

St. Joseph (March 19 and May 1).

The Birth of St. John the Baptist (June 24).

Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, the Holy Apostles (June 29).

Feast of the Holy Guardian Angels (October 2).

All Saints Day (November 1).

Before some feasts, are longer or shorter preparation periods, for example Advent is before Christmas Day and Lent is before Easter Sunday.

Advent is a special time to prepare for the birth of Jesus at Christmas. Advent begins the liturgical year and spans four Sundays. The word Advent comes from Latin and means coming or approaching.

Jesus is coming. At Christmas we remember and celebrate his birth. But we are also preparing for His return, which will be on the last day.

During Advent some things are different in the Church. For example, we have an Advent wreath. This is a circle of green leaves that surrounds four candles. The candles are lit, one for each Sunday of Advent reminding us that Jesus is the true light in this world. The Candles represent hope, faith, joy, and peace.

Another thing that is different in the Church is the priest's chasuble and other items representing the colors of the season. Purple is the color that the Church uses during the Advent season and it is a symbol of repentance and sorrow.

The themes of the Scripture readings and prayers in the Mass are also different and are marked by anticipation.

Every Advent we are invited to deepen and strengthen our relationship with God and our neighbor.

4 December: St. Barbara, virgin and martyr.

8 December: Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

12 December: Virgin Mary of Guadalupe.

13 December: St. Lucia, virgin and martyr.

14 December: St. John of the Cross.

23 December: St. Thorlac (Þorlákur helgi), the patron saint of Iceland. In Iceland, St. Thorlac has 2 feast days, 20th July and 23rd December.

25 December - Christmas Day: At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus 2000 years ago.

26 December: St. Stephens Day.

27 December: St. John, Apostle and Evangelist.

Sunday after Christmas (usually) - The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

1 January: Mary Mother of God.

6 January: Epiphany.

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord - Today we celebrate the feast of Jesus' baptism. This festival also reminds us of our own baptism.

2 February: Candlemas, The Feast of Purification of the blessed Virgin Mary.

19 March (and 1 May): Feast of St. Joseph, patron saint of the church.

25 March: Annunciation of the Lord.

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday and lasts for forty days.

Lent is a special time of repentance, prayer and preparation for the coming of Easter.

Catholics have two special days each year for fasting; Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Then they eat only one full meal. Catholics also do penance every Friday and every day of Lent.

On Ash Wednesday the faithful receive a cross of ashes on their foreheads during which the priest says: "Remember, you are dust and to dust you shall return."

During Holy Week, the Church celebrates the events of the last days of Jesus' life, before Easter.

Palm Sunday: On the sixth Sunday of Lent we commemorate Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The Mass includes blessing of the palms and a procession. On Palm Sunday we read two Gospels. The first Gospel tells us about the glorious entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. The second Gospel tells us of His agony and death.

Holy Thursday, also known as Maundy Thursday: In the evening of Maundy Thursday we commemorate the institution of the Eucharist by Jesus during the Last Supper.

The Mass of Maundy Thursday is the beginning of the Easter Triduum. These days are the most sacred of the year and culminate in the Easter Vigil, the highest Mass of the year.

Good Friday: The third event in the life of Jesus that we celebrate in the Holy Week are His suffering and death, which took place on Good Friday, about two thousand years ago. On Good Friday, we reflect on the innocent Lamb of God who was sacrificed for our sins. This is the day when we show the cross a special respect and we pray for the whole world.

Good Friday is a day of fasting and abstinence, a day when we do penance.

Saturday before Easter: Catholics pray and reflect on those things happening to Jesus and the reasons for it. It is as if we were kneeling at His grave, grieving and waiting for His resurrection.

Easter Sunday (the Sunday following the first full moon in Spring).

Easter Vigil - Late on Easter Saturday night, we celebrate His resurrection from the dead. This is done in a special way with the burning of candles and with many other symbols. This ceremony is one of the most beautiful in the church.

(I) The Easter Vigil begins when the Paschal candle prepared and is lit. We are reminded that in the beginning God created light. The beginning of Easter symbolizes the dawn of the new creation that began with the resurrection of Jesus. Then the Paschal candle leads us into the church. This reminds us of the fire which lit the way for the Israelites in the desert. This fire led them from the slavery of Egypt to the promised land. Now Christ, the Light of the World, leads us from the shackles of sin, through His death and resurrection to eternal life. This is represented by the one carrying the Paschal candle in Church. He walks in the path of the one who carried the cross into the Church on Good Friday and stood in the same three places in the Church.

When the Paschal candle is put in it's holder, the Exultet is sung. The Exultet is very old and can be traced in part back to the fourth century.

(II) Readings from the Scriptures are followed by Psalms and prayers. The story of the liberation of the Israelites at the Red Sea is always read. The second reading reminds us of our own salvation through baptism. Finally, the Gospel tell of Jesus' resurrection.

(III) Then the renewal of baptismal promises begins. We are reminded that in Baptism we obtain a share in the resurrection of Jesus. Through baptism, the resurrection of Jesus becomes a promise of our resurrection.

(IV) Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Easter Sunday

Easter is celebrated in remembrance of the resurrection. It is the greatest feast of the liturgical year. Because of His resurrection, Jesus has won complete victory over death and hell. The Paschal candle is the symbol of the resurrected Redeemer.

"The resurrection of Christ is the essence of the existence of the Church." "And if Christ has not risen, then our preaching is useless, as well as our faith." "The resurrection of Christ is the crown of our faith in Christ ..."

Feast of Divine Mercy: Second Sunday of Easter

Today we remember the infinite love and mercy of God, which he pours over the world. The Feast of Divine Mercy invites us to look at God as the source of real peace, which we receive by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. The wounds of the risen and glorified Lord are permanent symbols of the merciful love of God for humanity. From His wounds flows a kind of spiritual light that illuminates our conscience and gives us comfort and hope.

Today, we, along with people around the world, say: "Jesus, I trust in You!"

Vocations Sunday: Fourth Sunday of Easter. World Day of prayer for vocations.

Ascension Thursday is celebrated 40 days after Easter.

Pentecost is the Feastday of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Blessed Trinity. He is true God, together with the Father and the Son.

When the disciples were deprived of His visible presence, Jesus did not leave them orphans. He promised to be with them until the end of the world, so he sent them his Spirit. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary and the apostles at Pentecost in the form of tongues of fire. The Spirit is our life.

The month of May is especially dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The month of June is especially dedicated to the honour of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

24 June: Midsummer Day, Nativity of St. John the Baptist.

20 July: Summer Feast Day of St. Thorlac, the patron saint of Iceland. (Þorlákur helgi).

23 July: Consecration Day of Kristkirkja Cathedral

15 August: Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

8 September: Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

14 September: Feast of the Holy Cross. The cross was not meaningless for Jesus, but was the way to the resurrection. Now he lives forever and he calls us to the same victory. The cross is a sign of victory, not defeat.

The month of October is especially dedicated to praying the Holy Rosary.

In November, we pray especially for those who have died.

1 November: All Saints Day.

2 November: All Souls Day.

Christ the King: On this last Sunday of the liturgical year we celebrate Christ the King.