

Faith in Five – Adults The Liturgical Calendar



1. In the 4th century, the Church and Christianity grew when Emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire. Religious celebrations increased and there was a need to manage them. The reforms of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and the development of a universal calendar helped to organize these celebrations ([Source](#)).
2. The Church calendar evolved over the past 450 years. While the methods of categorizing the various festivals have varied, the Church has been consistent in her effort to arrange the events according to importance. A hierarchical classification process was used and later simplified by the Second Vatican Council, into three kinds of celebrations: solemnities, feasts, and memorials.
3. **Sunday** - The documents of the Second Vatican Council reflect on the importance of Sunday: “The Lord’s Day is the original feast day.... Other celebrations, unless they be truly of greatest importance shall not take precedence over the Sunday which is the foundation and kernel of the whole liturgical year” (Sacrosanctum Concilium, No. 106).
4. **Solemnities** are the highest rank among Church celebrations, a day that recalls and glorifies an important event in the life of Jesus and the most significant mysteries of the Catholic Christian faith: Christmas, Epiphany, Easter (the Easter Octaves including Divine Mercy Sunday), Pentecost, Holy Trinity, Ascension, Corpus Christi, Sacred Heart, Christ the King. In addition, honored as a solemnity are the days associated with the Blessed Mother: the Immaculate Conception, the Assumption, the Annunciation and Mary, Mother of God. Some saints are acknowledged with a solemnity: St. Joseph, the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, Saints Peter and Paul and All Saints Day.
5. For solemnities, the celebration begins with evening prayers on the day before. If it is a holy day of obligation, there is a vigil Mass. If the solemnity falls on a weekday, the daily Mass is enacted like the Sunday liturgy, which contains three readings, the Gloria and the Creed. All the prayers of the Mass reflect on the event or person being celebrated.
6. Solemnities that are fixed days occur on the same day every year. For example, a “fixed” solemnity on the liturgical calendar is November 1, All Saints Day or December 25, Christmas. Other solemnities are “moveable” — that is, their dates change or move based on the date of Easter for that year.
7. **Feasts** typically honor a special saint or an important event in Christian history: the Baptism of the Lord, the Conversion of St. Paul, the Transfiguration, the Visitation, the Presentation of the Lord, the Holy Family, the Birth of Mary, the Dedication of the Basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome, the Holy Innocents, the Triumph of the Holy Cross, and the Chair of Peter.
8. Lower-ranked “feast days” are properly known as memorials. **Memorials** are identified as either obligatory, those that must be celebrated universally on an assigned day, or

optional, meaning it is up to the celebrant of the Mass to celebrate that particular saint or mystery. All memorials are fixed on the annual calendar. Memorials most often honor the pious life of a saint but may also celebrate some aspect of the Lord (example: Holy Name) or of Mary (Immaculate Heart of Mary).

9. **Holy Days of Obligation:** All Sundays are days of obligation for the faithful. There are six holy days of obligation identified in the United States: Mary, Mother of God, the Ascension, the Assumption, All Saints, the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas. While all holy days of obligation are solemnities, not all solemnities are holy days of obligation.
10. The purpose of a liturgical calendar is to center our year around Christ, and the Word, that we may receive the fullness of Him. The Church year is structured around the life of Jesus: beginning with the first signs of His coming in Advent to His birth at Christmas, to His trials in Lent, suffering and death on Good Friday; His glorious Resurrection and Ascension, and finally at the end of the year and for all times, Jesus enthroned as King in glory. As the Catechism (1194) explains, "The Church, 'in the course of the year ... unfolds the whole mystery of Christ'". By way of the liturgical calendar, we can closely reflect and engage in the life of Jesus.
11. The Church assigns appropriate scriptural readings for each day of the year: generally an Old Testament passage, a responsorial psalm, a portion of an epistle and a Gospel story. The cadence of our liturgical observances remains constant each year, but our cycle of readings for these observances varies. The Church follows a two-year cycle for daily Mass and a three-year (A, B, C) cycle for Sundays. This allows us to participate in the Scriptures as fully as possible. The Church uses the liturgical calendar to teach us to see "Christ in all the Scriptures." The liturgical calendar helps transform our life and the way we see Jesus throughout the year.
12. The Liturgical Calendar follows a three-year cycle, each year being represented by the letters, A, B, and C. During the year A cycle, the Gospel of St. Matthew is the primary Gospel used for the readings. In year B, it is primarily the Gospel of St. Mark; in year C, St. Luke. The Gospel of St. John is proclaimed on particular Sundays in each of the years.
13. The liturgical year is made up of six seasons ([USCCB](#)):
 - Advent** - four weeks of preparation before the celebration of Jesus' birth
 - Christmas** - recalls the Nativity of Jesus Christ and his manifestation to the peoples of the world
 - Lent** - a six-week period of penance before Easter
 - Sacred Paschal Triduum** - the holiest "Three Days" of the Church's year, where the Christian people recall the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
 - Easter** - 50 days of joyful celebration of the Lord's resurrection from the dead and his sending forth of the Holy Spirit
 - Ordinary Time** - divided into two sections (one span of 4-8 weeks after Christmas Time and another lasting about six months after Easter Time). The focus during this time is on Jesus' teachings and works.

14. The Liturgical Colors of the season ([directly from USCCB](#))

White – Christmas Time and Easter Time; celebrations of the Lord (except of his Passion), of Mary, of the Angels, and of Saints who were not Martyrs; solemnities of the Most Holy Trinity (Sunday after Pentecost), of All Saints (November 1), and of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist (June 24); feasts of the Conversion of St. Paul (January 25), of the Chair of St. Peter (February 22), and of St. John (December 27); also permitted in the United States at Masses for the Dead

Red – Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Pentecost Sunday; celebrations of the Lord's Passion, of Apostles, and of Evangelists; celebrations of Martyrs

Green – Ordinary Time

Violet – Advent and Lent; Masses for the Dead

Other liturgical colors not represented on this calendar include rose (Third Sunday of Advent and Fourth Sunday of Lent), black (Masses for the Dead), and gold or silver (permitted in the United States for more solemn occasions)".

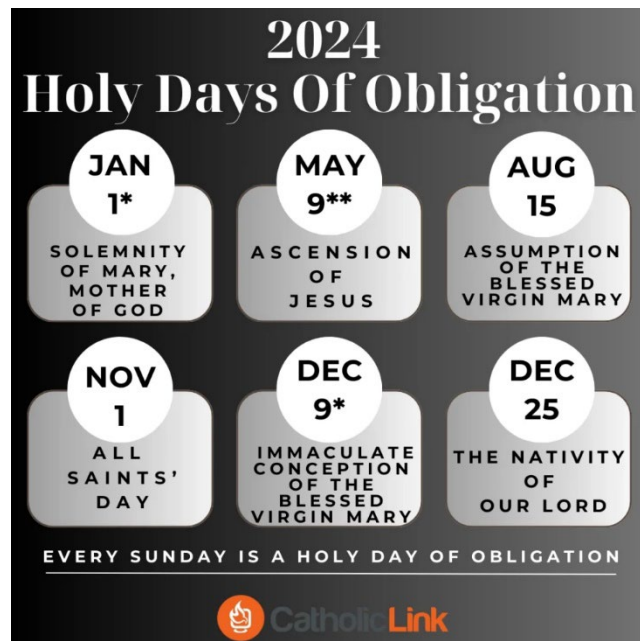
15. How to walk through the year liturgically:

a. Access a Catholic calendar, be aware of important dates of celebration for the week and month. These calendars or planner will many times identify the liturgical season.

b. Attend Mass, pay attention to the weekly readings, the cycle year, the color of the vestments worn and Mass.

c. Wear church outfits coinciding with a feast day or season. Live liturgically at home, celebrate with special foods, décor honoring the season.

d. Share reminders with family and friends of the important Holy Days of obligation, take time off from work as able to participate in the important events of the church year: example, Paschal Triduum.



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The Liturgical Year

A simple guide to learn about the liturgical times of the Catholic Church



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And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years."
Genesis 1:14

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