

Faith in Five – Adults The Octave of Christmas



1. In the Old Testament, certain celebrations such as the Feast of Booths (Leviticus 23:33) and the Feast of the dedication of the Temple (2 Chronicles 7:9) lasted 8 days. The Church began the custom of prolonging the celebration of certain major feasts, including Easter and Christmas, across eight days. This allows us more than just a day to contemplate the sublime mysteries celebrated in the chief feasts of our faith. We need time to reflect on and experience in our hearts what God is revealing on these holy days.

The word "octave" comes from a Latin root meaning "eight". The feast day itself is the first day of the octave, and the eighth day is called the Octave Day. The term octave can thus refer both to the eighth day alone and to the entire period of eight days.

2. **The Octave of Christmas** contains several other holy days: the feasts of the Holy Family, St. Stephen, St. John the Evangelist, the Holy Innocents, St. Thomas Becket and Pope St. Sylvester. Each of these celebrations points us in its own distinctive way to the Nativity of Our Lord, helping us to ponder the implications of the Word made flesh who came to dwell among us. All of these celebrations honor the love for Jesus.

December 26: St. Stephen – anyone who wishes to follow Christ must take up his cross. He was full of faith and the Holy Spirit. St. Stephen is the first martyr and saint.

December 27: St John the Evangelist – God is love; St. John encourages how to live in the manner of Christ in His gospel. He is the chief evangelist on the divinity of Christ.

December 28: Feast of the Holy Innocents – to remind us of all those killed under the rule of Herod – in their innocence they died for Christ. This feast also marks the angel's warning to St. Joseph to flee with Mary and Jesus in the middle of the night to Egypt. The Gospel on this day draws attention to two major issues of concern to the Church today: immigration and abortion. We focus on the preciousness of life.

December 29: St. Thomas Becket, murdered for defending the Church from domination by King Henry II. Catholics can find inspiration to be courageous in their steadfastness with what they know to be right and holy.

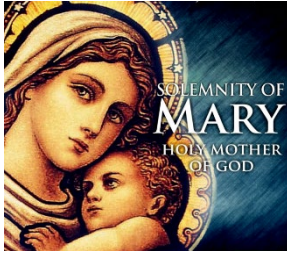
December 30: Feast of the Holy Family – this Feast falls on the first Sunday after Christmas. The Holy family is a model family for the world. Their love and faith in God never wavered despite their circumstances.



This feast developed at the beginning of the 19th century in Canada and then spread to the entire Church in 1920. It is a

Feast that seeks to portray the Holy Family of Nazareth as the "true model of life" from which our families can draw inspiration and know where to find help and comfort. The Gospel stories about the Holy Family teach us the only way to endure and overcome the trials of this life is to have the faith and the courage to place our trust in God. To imitate the Holy Family let us pray for faith, grace and wisdom from God. With His help, it is possible to accept all things even if, like Joseph and Mary, we don't always understand.

December 31: Pope St. Sylvester – was selected as pope after Constantine ended persecution of Christians. He oversaw the first era of peace and Christianity on earth. He supported the Council of Nicea where the Church proclaimed Jesus as both human and divine, consubstantial with the Father. He approved the Nicene Creed. Pope St. Sylvester teaches us to trust God during transition and challenging times.



Jan 1: Feast ends with **the Solemnity of Mary**, which seems appropriate and fitting to be celebrated on a Marian feast day. Peace is only possible through total self-sacrifice and surrender – through total love and obedience to the will of God, of which Mary is an icon for the Church. This is also a fitting time to venerate the mother of the Incarnate Word and to imitate her faith as we face a new year in the civil calendar.

3. The Church encourages families to attend daily Mass and pray some hours of the Liturgy of the Hours every day during the Christmas Octave. On the Feast of the Holy Family, members of the family should try to attend Mass together and there renew both their marriage vows and the family's entrustment to the patronage of the Holy Family.
4. **What are the 12 days of Christmas?** This is the period of time from, The Nativity of our Lord on December 25, to Epiphany, the manifestation of Christ to the Magi, January 6th. Legend states the song, The 12 days of Christmas contain symbolism used to teach the tenets of the Catholic faith during the 14th-17th century when Catholicism could not be practiced. It is believed these symbols represent the following:

A Partridge in a Pear Tree - Jesus Christ
Two Turtle Doves - The Old and New Testaments
Three French Hens - The three virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity or the Trinity
Four Calling/Collie Birds - Four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
Five Golden Rings - First five books of the Old Testament
Six Geese-a-Laying - Six days of creation before God's rest on the seventh day
Seven Swans-a-Swimming - Seven gifts of the Holy Spirit
Eight Maids-a-Milking - Eight Beatitudes
Nine Ladies Dancing - Nine fruits of the Holy Spirit
Ten Lords-a-Leaping - Ten Commandments
Eleven Pipers Piping - Eleven faithful disciples
Twelve Drummers Drumming - Twelve points of belief in the Apostles' Creed

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