

THE LITURGICAL YEAR

The Church year, or **liturgical year**, is an annual cycle of seasons and celebrations that honor and celebrate the mystery of Christ as we move from day to day and season to season. Centered on the great feast of the Easter Triduum, the seasons enable us to walk with Jesus once again through his birth, his life on earth, his passion, death, resurrection, and ascension.

Sundays are the heart of our weekly liturgical cycle. Each Sunday, or Lord's Day, we celebrate at Mass that Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week. Sunday is a time to rest from work, to enjoy God's gift of creation and family and to serve those in need.

The seasons of the church year are as follows:

1. **Advent** (liturgical color is *purple* signifying a time of expectation) is the season of the church year when we prepare to celebrate the mystery of Christ's coming at Christmas and at the end of time. Advent means "coming". Advent last for four weeks.
2. **Christmas** (liturgical color is *white or gold* signifying joy) is the season during the Church year when we celebrate the birth of Jesus, God's greatest gift to us.
3. **Lent** (liturgical color is *purple* signifying a time of expectation) is the season when we prepare to celebrate the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection and deepen the conversion symbolized and begun in our Baptism. Lent is a

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special time of prayer, penance, and works of love. **It begins on Ash Wednesday.** Ashes remind us that we will die and be held accountable to God for our lives. Ashes also symbolize the call to God for us to give up our sins through the power of Jesus's death and resurrection. **Lent lasts for forty days.**

4. **The Easter Triduum** (liturgical color is *purple* signifying a time of expectation) where the Church remembers in a special way the death and resurrection of Jesus. These three days are the most important days of the Church year. The Triduum begins on **Holy Thursday** with the evening Mass of the Lord's Supper. It continues through **Good Friday** with the celebration of the passion of the Lord. On **Holy Saturday**, the Triduum reaches its high point in the Easter Vigil and it concludes with evening prayer on Easter Sunday.
5. **Easter** (liturgical color is *white or gold, signifying joy, and red* on Pentecost) is the season when we celebrate the **Resurrection, Ascension**, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at **Pentecost**.
6. **Ordinary time** (liturgical color is *green, a sign of hope*) is the season in which we remember and celebrate the teachings, stories, and events of Jesus's life. Ordinary time is the periods between Christmas and Lent and after Easter until Advent.

FASTING AND ABSTINENCE

Ash Wednesday and all Fridays in Lent , including Good Friday, are days of **abstinence** from meat by all Catholics over 14 years of age. For Catholics, there are only two days each year where **fasting** is also required: Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. All Catholics between the ages of 18 and 59 are bound to observe the fast. On fast days, one full meatless meal may be taken, and two other smaller meatless meals, sufficient to maintain strength according to one's needs. Fasting and abstinence from meat is simply a way of denying ourselves. It is meant to bring our hearts and minds closer to God. When we feel those pangs of hunger, we turn to God in prayer and ask for the strength to carry on. We offer up our small sufferings to unite with the sufferings of Christ.

HOLY DAYS OF OBLIGATION

The Church in the United States observes the following six days of obligation. On these days Catholics are required to attend Mass.

1. January 1, the **Solemnity of Mary**, where we honor Mary, the Mother of God.
2. 40 days after Easter, the **Ascension**, where we remember that Jesus ascended (returned) to his Father in heaven.
3. August 15, the **Assumption of Mary**, where Jesus assumed (took) His mother to heaven.

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4. November 1, **All Saints Day**, where we honor all the saints (holy people) in heaven.
5. December 8, the **Immaculate Conception**, where we pay tribute to Mary who was born without Original Sin.
6. December 25, **Christmas**, where we celebrate the birth of Jesus, our Savior.