

RCIA
Days of Celebration
Session # 8

The celebration throughout the year of the mysteries of the Lord's birth, life, death, and Resurrection is arranged in such a way that the entire year becomes a "year of the Lord's grace". Thus the cycle of the Liturgical year and the great feasts constitute the basic rhythm of the Christian's life of prayer, with its focal point at Easter.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church
(#1168)



LITURGICAL YEAR

(also called)

Church Year

Liturgical Calendar Roman Calendar

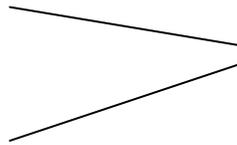
Rank of Celebrations throughout the Year:

Solemnities
Feasts
Memorials
Optional Memorials
Weekdays

Days of the Week:

Sundays - **Great Sunday (Easter)**
 Other Sundays (Little Easter)
 All Solemnities

Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Friday
Saturday



Weekday celebrations can be:

***Solemnities**
***Feasts**
***Memorials**
***Optional Memorials**
*** Weekdays**

The mystery of Christ is celebrated throughout the year. In addition, the Church witnesses to Mary and the saints who model devotion to God. Each day has an assigned rank.

Solemnities – principal days observing aspects of the paschal mystery

Feasts – special days celebrating the mystery of salvation or life of a saint

Memorials – saints of universal significance are remembered in the entire Church (obligatory)

Optional Memorials – saints of national or regional significance, or religious order saints are Remembered (optional)

Weekdays – no special aspect is celebrated: an ordinary celebration / remembrance of the mystery of salvation

The **Church Calendar** is divided into the mysteries of Christ and celebrated in seasons of the **Church year**.

Advent – begins the liturgical year with the 1st Sunday of Advent and

Goes to December 24

Christmas – begins with the vigil of Christmas on December 24 and
Goes through the Sunday after January 6

Lent – begins on Ash Wednesday and lasts until the Holy Thursday
Mass of the Lord's Supper.

Easter Triduum – begins with the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy
Thursday and lasts until Easter Sunday.

Easter Season – begins with Easter and lasts for 50 days to Pentecost.

Ordinary Time – begins after the Sunday following January 6 (end of
Christmas Season) and last through the day before Ash
Wednesday. It also begins the day after Pentecost and
Ends the day before Advent.

Each season is commemorated with feasts and customs which keep alive the spirit of the celebration. Christmas and Easter are rich in seasonal traditions and cultural customs.

Sunday – A historical look

Sundays evolved around the assemblies on the weekly anniversary of Christ's resurrection. They were called the weekly Pascha, a weekly commemoration of the Paschal Mystery. Sundays kept alive his memory and presence. They are the foundation and nucleus of what would become the church year, serving eventually as pivotal points for the unfolding of the tradition-rich seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter. Sunday traditions feature an assembly for Eucharistic worship with a cycle of Scripture readings, official prayers, and seasonal themes. They also keep alive a special respect for the holiness of the day, usually by way of some kind of resting from ordinary work.

The first followers of Jesus were Jews. For a while they continued to observe Sabbath (Hebrew *shabbat*, to "leave off" or "to rest") traditions. They dedicated this seventh, or last, day of the week to the one God, Yahweh, in accord with the Genesis creation story (Genesis 2: 1- 3) and the 3rd Commandment: "Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day" (Exodus 20: 8). The Jewish Sabbath provided a regular rhythm to life with traditions that emphasized rest or absence of work and physical activities. It was also a day of assembly and a feast day. Special sacrifices were offered in the temple at Jerusalem. During the centuries preceding Christianity, attendance at local synagogues, which had come into existence during the Exile, became a popular practice. There the people prayed and listened to readings of holy writing, or Scriptures, and instruction. This one day of the week also sanctified the home life of the Jews with detailed ceremonies surrounding the Sabbath meal.

First Day of the Week

From the very beginning those who believed Jesus was the Christ gathered together weekly on the first day of the Jewish week, the anniversary of his being raised from the dead. This fundamental theme of Sunday as the first day of the week runs counter to our popular cultural thinking that Sunday is part of the weekend, an ending introduced by "Thank God, it's Friday," rather than an all important beginning.

This special day was reckoned by early Christians from sunset to sunset, as were all days according to Jewish custom. The first Christian assemblies were, therefore, most probably in the evening of the Sabbath Day.

From Saturday evening...

There seem to have been two assemblies at the beginning. On Saturday (Sabbath) morning, Christians came together for a service of the Word and prayer modeled on the Synagogue practice. Then, probably Saturday evening (1Corinthians 11: 17 – 24), beginning the first day of the week, those who believed Jesus was the Christ would gather in one of their homes, a primitive house-church, for a meal (1 Corinthians 11: 17 – 22), probably the full Sabbath meal. A ritual of blessing a Eucharistic cup and bread highlighted this meal. In this way Christians kept alive the memory and presence of Christ as he had requested (Luke 22: 19; 1 Corinthians 11: 23 – 26). This ritual was familiar to them because the weekly Sabbath meal, as also the annual Seder meal of Passover, included a special blessing of bread and cup. The Acts of the Apostles provides a delightful account of one such assembly and meal—and a teenager who fell asleep (20: 7 – 12).

It is clear from the apostle Paul's letters that in some places extraordinary gifts of the Spirit were evident in the assembly: speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, prophesying, and

healing (see 1 Corinthians 14: 1 – 40). Mention is also made of a collection of funds, or alms, for the needy (1 Corinthians 16: 2).

The following morning, Sunday, continued the first day of the week. This was an ordinary weekday on which all went about their business and daily chores.

... to Sunday Morning

In the early 2nd century, this Eucharistic ritual was moved to before dawn on Sunday, the first day of the week. This change may have been caused by persecution. A decree of Emperor Trajan forbade suspicious gatherings in the evening. The change may also have been the result of increasing gentile conversions. Free of Sabbath traditions, they would not have had a particular interest in continuing a Sabbath evening ritual. A time before dawn was necessary because Sunday was still an ordinary workday.

This Sunday morning assembly probably combined what originally had been two separate assemblies: (1) singing hymns and psalms, prayers, reading of the Hebrew and New Scriptures, some form of preaching or instruction, very possibly some form of testifying, and (2) the Eucharistic ritual. The Service of the Word could now serve as an introduction to the Eucharistic ritual. This new arrangement was possible because the Eucharist had been separated from a regular meal as a result of abuses (1 Corinthians 11: 7 – 11) and because it was transferred from Sunday night to Sunday morning. By the year 165, this Sunday ritual already had a form that would be recognized by Catholic today as Sunday Mass. Afterwards people went about their daily work and chores. During the first centuries of Christianity the notion of resting on this special day was unheard of.

The Lord's Day

The importance of Sunday is captured by the name given to it before the turn of the 1st century. In Revelation 1:7 it is called "the Lord's Day". This title does not dedicate the day to God in some general sense but precisely to the resurrected Christ whose proper title is "Lord". The day belongs to the Lord. This title had a special ring to it for Christians of those first generations. It called to mind Christ's kingly glory earned through death and resurrection. In using this title for the day, Jesus was being defined as a victor over the other "lords" of those times, specifically the Roman emperors who claimed divinity and were persecuting Christians. It also associated the day with the Lord's Supper.

The Lords Day remains the church's official title for Sunday. Its Latin form, *dies dominica* or *dominicum*, is the origin of the title still used in the Romance languages: *domencia* in Italian, *domingo* in Spanish and Portuguese, and *dimanche*, in French.

Sunday

The popular title, "Sunday", is a contribution from the Germanic peoples and is an example of how culture and pagan traditions influenced Christian religious traditions. This title comes from pre-Christian worship of the sun. Christians, in tune with symbolism, were comfortable with this descriptive title for the most sacred of their days. From the beginning Christ had been identified as "the light of the world" (John 8:12, 9:5, 12: 46), "light of revelation to the Gentiles" (Luke 2:32), "true light" who "enlightens every person"(John 1:9). This association of the Christian's greatest day with the sun is also fitting because the sun is life-giving and never defeated, an annual lesson experienced on the occasion of the winter solstice.

Sunday Obligation

Followers of Jesus took it for granted that all the baptized would participate in the Sunday Eucharistic assembly. For the first three centuries no particular church discipline enforced participation in the Sunday assembly, or Mass. Weekly participation was motivated by deep devotion to Christ's resurrection and expectation that this Christ would return shortly in glory. This motivation eventually waned. Already in the Letter to the Hebrews, about 96 of the Common Era (C.E.), there is mention of this: "Let us hold unswervingly to our profession which gives us hope...We should not absent ourselves from the assembly, as some do, but encourage one another; and this all the more because you see the day draws near" (Hebrews 10: 23, 25).

At the beginning of the 4th Century in Spain, the Council of Elvira declared that persons were to be excommunicated for a short time if they lived in the area and yet neglected Mass for Three Sundays. By the 13th century it had become a common law of the church that all Catholics, seven years of age and older, must attend Mass on Sunday unless dispensed or excused for a serious reason. This attendance became a universal obligation only with the 1917 Code of Canon Law.

The present law of the church regarding mass attendance reads: "On Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass..." (Canon 1247). There is a big difference in the spirit of this current church law promulgated in 1983 and that of the old law (1917-1983). In the old law, the faithful were bound only to be physically present at mass, "to hear" Mass. The new law, in using the words "to participate in the Mass," encourages active presence.

Contemporary Observance of Sunday

The Second Vatican Council reemphasized the sacred meaning of Sunday popular from the beginning of Christianity: "For on this day Christ's faithful should come together into one place so that, by hearing the word of God and taking part in the Eucharist, they may call to mind, the passion, the resurrection, and the glorification of the Lord Jesus, and may thank God... (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 106).

With the reform of the church's liturgy after the Second Vatican Council came the popularity of Mass on the eve of Sunday. Unfortunately this has come to be considered as Saturday evening Mass. In reality, it is Sunday Mass. This is in harmony with the practice of early Christians, who reckoned their days from sunset to sunset.

Sacred Times

From apostolic times, Sunday has been truly the Lord's Day, because Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday. Catholics observe Sunday by attending liturgy and observing the day with rest and relaxation.

Other holy days are solemnly observed. On these days of obligation, Catholics are required to attend mass. In the United States, there are six:

December 25 – Christmas

January 1 – Feast of Mary, Mother of God

Forty Days after Easter – Ascension Day

August 15 – Feast of Mary's Assumption into Heaven

November 1 – All Saints' Day

December 8 - Mary's Immaculate Conception

Holy Days of Obligation in the United States

All Sundays of the year – because it is a day commemorating the Resurrection of the Lord.

All Saints' Day – November 1 – a day to rejoice with all those saints who have given witness to God by the way they have lived their lives.

The Immaculate Conception – December 8 – we celebrate Mary's conception in her mother's womb nine months before her birthday. (September 8th). The Church teaches That Mary was free from sin from the moment she was conceived.

Christmas – December 25 – we celebrate the birth of Christ into the world. "The Word was Made flesh".

The Solemnity of Mary – January 1st – we celebrate one of the days of Christmas; we recall The Mother of God as we rejoice in the days of a new year with Christ in our World as a human person – and she who gave him birth.

Ascension Thursday – 40 Days after Easter – we celebrate the day that Jesus ascended into Heaven; the day he left earth and promised to send the Holy Spirit to be our Guide.

The Assumption of Mary – we celebrate the day Mary is taken into heaven, body and soul. The Church teaches that her body did not rest in the earth, but was taken into Heaven where she is with her Son forever.

Fast and Abstinence

Fasting – It is defined as a limitation on food and drink. In a broader sense, it is examining our lives and identifying ways that we could help ourselves put priorities back in order – by denying ourselves or taking positive actions toward a conversion of heart.

Currently, the regulations for days of Fast encourage taking only one full meal a day – with breakfast and lunch not equaling the full meal.

Abstaining – is the refraining from eating meat. From the first Century, the day of the crucifixion has been traditionally observed as a day of abstaining from meat to honor Christ who sacrificed his life on a Friday.

Fast & Abstinence Days: Ash Wednesday and Good Friday

Abstinence Days: All Fridays of Lent

Eucharistic Fast

The Eucharistic fast was a practice from ancient times. It was prescribed by the Councils of Carthage (254) and Antioch (268) as a way of showing respect and reverence for the Sacred Eucharist. It was a universal practice by the 5th century.

Historically – the fast was from midnight the night before, including water and medicine.

- in 1953, the fast was reduced to three hours from solid food and alcoholic drink; and water was no longer included in the fast.
- in 1964, the Fast was reduced to one hour, including all food and drink, allowing water and medicine anytime. **This is what the Fast is Today.**
- in 1973, fast for the elderly and sick was reduced to 15 minutes, including those attending them if one hour would be too difficult.

Liturgical Colors

The use of color in the Church as an aspect of its symbolism in the liturgy is of early origin, although in the days of the Roman Empire white was most commonly used. Color as such became a mark of distinction in dress, and in the Middle Ages there was added the sequence of colors in vestments to be used for various feasts. The modern sequence of colors are five: white, red, green, violet and rose. Any shade of these colors is permitted.

The colors and their use are: **White**, in the offices and Masses of the Easter and Christmas seasons; on feasts and memorials of the Lord, other than of his passion; on feasts and memorials of Mary, the angels, saints who were not martyrs, All Saints (November 1), John the Baptist (June 24), John the Evangelist (December 27), the Chair of St. Peter (February 22), and the Conversion of St. Paul (January 25).

Red is used on Passion Sunday (Palm Sunday) and Good Friday, Pentecost, celebrations of the Lord's passion, birthday feasts of the apostles and evangelists, and celebrations of martyrs.

Green is used in the offices and Masses of Ordinary Time.

Violet is used in Lent and Advent. It may also be worn in offices and Masses for the dead.

Black may be used in Masses for the dead.

Rose may be used on *Gaudete* Sunday (3rd Sunday of Advent) and *Laetare* Sunday (4th Sunday of Lent).