

THE LITURGICAL YEAR IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Happy New Year to you all our dear esteemed readers. A new liturgical year is here upon us again and the season of Advent has launched us into this New Year in the Catholic Church.

A liturgical year or church year can be described as the span of time, one solar year long, comprising fifty-two weeks beginning with the first Sunday of Advent and ending with the Saturday of the 34th week in Ordinary time. The liturgical year memorializes the redemptive mysteries of Christ and their efficacy in sanctifying the Saints, thus inviting all the faithful to honour them and live in a similar spirit. All the activities and festivities of the church are celebrated within the liturgical year and the year is well arranged to accommodate the various seasons in the church. The liturgical year is composed of two cycles which runs simultaneously: (1) the temporal cycle which commemorates the mysteries of Christ. This cycle consists of five seasons, which includes: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Ordinary time. (2) The sanctoral cycle which remembers the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints. This cycle is ordinarily arranged by the date of the death of the Saint, celebrated annually, together with several feasts of Our Lady.

ADVENT SEASON

This is the first season in a liturgical year. Advent is from the Latin word “adventus” which means coming or arrival. It is a four-week period which starts on the Sunday after Christ the King and ends on December 24th. The season of Advent is both a season of preparation and that of expectation. It is primarily penitential in spirit, but still reflects the joy of anticipation. This season is divided into two: the first part is that of preparation which is from first Sunday till 16th December. While the second part is that of expectation which is from 17th December-24th December. During this season of Advent, we recall three main things. Firstly, we recall the coming in flesh of the Son of God over 2000 years ago. Secondly, we remind ourselves of Christ indwelling amongst us, his presence in the hearts of all the faithful, especially in the Holy Eucharist. Thirdly, we remind ourselves also of his second coming to judge the living and the dead. This season is a season of intense prayers and spiritual preparation of our hearts that the coming of the Lord might meet us ever ready. During this season, there is the Advent wreath that is always blessed on the first Sunday of Advent. The advent wreath is formed from sprigs of green foliage in a circular shape, which surround four candles, the wreath sits on a table or altar. This candles are lighted on each of the four Sundays of advent and it symbolizes the coming of Christ, the light of the world. The colour of vestment used during this season is violet or rose, which brings out the tone of repentance and penitence.

CHRISTMAS SEASON

Christmas time or season is a period where we celebrate the birthday of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Although the day of the birthday is 25th December, yet the season extends beyond just a single day and it spans for a period of 12 – 14 days. The season starts with the Christmas Eve on 24th December and ends on the feast of the Baptism of the lord. This season is a season of joy and happiness. It is usually regarded as the most interesting part of the year due to the various festivities and celebrations that accompany it. The feasts of the liturgical year place before our minds the sign of some hidden sacred reality that must be applied to all of us.

During Christmas season this hidden sacred reality is the light, the life, and the joy beaming from Christ, the “Sun of Justice,” upon humankind in the darkness of ignorance and sin (Mal. 4:2). The mystery of our salvation is to be honoured not as something that happened 2,000 years ago, but as something present, for while the act itself (Christ’s birth and manifestation) is past, its effects are very present. The hidden reality in this mystery is ultimately Christ himself and his saving actions. He is present in the Mystery of Christmas- Epiphany, constantly communicating in holy symbols and interceding for us. The colour of vestment during this season is white or Gold which symbolizes joy.

LENTEN SEASON

This is purely a penitential season of prayer starting with Ash Wednesday and continuing till Holy Saturday. It is a period of 40 days (excluding Sundays) of penance, prayer and almsgiving. Besides preparing the people better for the Easter season, it also predisposes us to receive more of the graces Christ has earned through his passion and death. The twofold character of this season is (1) to perform penance and (2) to recall or prepare for Baptism. The Lenten liturgy calls us to deepen the sense of our condition as baptized people. We do this by choosing to follow Christ more closely. Lent is a time of penance and renewal for the entire church. It is not enough for us to make commitment to do it individually. We must be one with the entire mystical body of Christ. The colour of vestment during this season is purple or Violet.

EASTER SEASON

This yearly celebration of the Resurrection of Christ is the oldest and most solemn Christian feast and it is considered the center of the Liturgical year. It is also called the pasch after the Jewish feast commemorating the emancipation of the Jews from their slavery in Egypt. All other feast of the Liturgical Year depend upon the date of Easter. The season of Easter begins with the Easter Vigil and ends on Pentecost Sunday. It has a span of fifty days in all. This period is a very important period in the life of the Church and its importance can be seen in the through preparation we make during Lent by the special ceremonies of Holy Week. The Octave of Easter and the 7 Sundays of Easter goes a long way to tell us how important this season really is. The colour of vestment during this season is white or gold to symbolize the joy we experience at celebrating the Lord’s resurrection from the dead.

ORDINARY TIME SEASON

Ordinary Time is the name given to the part of the liturgical year that does not fall within one of the major seasons listed above and does not observe any specific aspect of the Mystery of Christ. It numbers 33 or 34 weeks and its assigned to two periods of the year: (1) from the day after the baptism of the Lord to the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday and (2) from the Monday after Pentecost to Saturday before first Sunday of Advent. During this time the church continues to celebrate our Lord’s Resurrection but in its application to our earthly lives. The time after the Baptism covers the beginning of Christ’s preaching, his baptism and his first manifestation. The time of Pentecost covers Christ’s public ministry of healing and preaching. In contrast to the major seasons of the Liturgical Year, which celebrate the various moments of the History of Salvation and take up their colouration, Ordinary Time unfolds

Sunday by Sunday bereft of any particular celebration except for a few feasts of devotion or of saints. This season introduces us in a special way into the Mystery of the Church, which was born on the day of Pentecost and is laboriously built up in our history. Ordinary Time is thus a period of growth in the faith for all who follow the liturgy. It is a time for accentuating all the Christian virtues. The colour of vestment during this period is Green which symbolizes life and fertility.