

Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1

Every Day with Jesus

I have grown in my understanding that what Jesus said and did all those many years ago is now present in real time. We are in real time sitting with Jesus at the Lord's Supper, standing at the foot of the cross, with Mary Magdalen at the empty tomb, with the disciples behind locked doors.

—Henry L., a daily Mass attendee

The Church invites us to worship at Mass every day, and it assures us that we will receive the power of daily Mass. It does this by making the mysteries of Christ and his graces present and available to us through the seasons of the liturgical year.

The Liturgical Year

We organize our lives according to overlapping calendars. We follow the annual seasons from spring to winter. We mark our time with work and school schedules. We have fiscal calendars that tell us when our bills are due. Annually, we celebrate holidays that commemorate people and

events: Presidents' Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Veterans Day, and so on. We have personal calendars that track important occasions in our life. For example, for the past decade my brother-in-law has compiled the annual "Ghezzi Family Calendar." I consult it frequently to remember to greet my sixteen grandchildren on their birthdays.

As Christians, we live by a different sort of calendar called the liturgical year. As it progresses, the liturgical year brings us into a daily relationship with Jesus. "Within the cycle of a year," said the bishops at the Second Vatican Council, the Church "unfolds the whole mystery of Christ, from the incarnation and birth until the ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of blessed hope and of the coming of the Lord."¹

These events represented in the liturgical year are not locked in the past like historical events. For example, we can only celebrate the signing of the Declaration of Independence with books, movies, blog posts, reenactments, parades, and fireworks. We can imagine looking over the shoulders of Thomas Jefferson as he wrote it, but we cannot get back to the event to re-present it.

During the course of the liturgical year, the Church actually brings us into the presence of Christ in the saving events of his life. "Recalling thus the mysteries of redemption," said the bishops at Vatican II, "the Church opens to the faithful the riches of her Lord's powers and merits, so that these are in some way made present for all time, and the faithful are enabled to lay hold upon them and become filled with saving grace."²

For example, forty days after Easter we celebrate Christ's ascension to his Father in heaven, but we don't remember it merely as a past event. By grace, the Lord's ascension is present to us and we rise to heaven with Christ because we are in him. St. Augustine explains this in a sermon on the feast:

Today our Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven; let our hearts ascend with him. Listen to the words of the Apostle: *If you have risen with Christ, set your hearts on things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God; seek the things that are above, not the things that are on earth* (Col 3:1–2). For just as he remained with us after his ascension, so we too are already in heaven with him, even though what is promised us has not yet been fulfilled in our bodies. . . . Out of compassion for us he descended from heaven, and although he ascended alone, we also ascend because we are in him by grace.³

Never Boring, Always Sacred, Very Practical

As we live and celebrate each liturgical year (and each year is different), we are reminded:

- life is far from ordinary, boring routine;
- every moment of time is sacred;
- the whole of salvation history . . . is gradually unpacked and pondered over in the year's seasons and feasts, keeping the paschal mystery at the heart of our lives;
- celebrating these sacred events helps us to adopt Jesus' lifestyle here and now.⁴

—Janet Schaeffler, O.P.

Thus, the liturgical year brings us immeasurable benefits. Celebrating its seasons at Sunday Mass and daily Mass opens us afresh to the riches of Christ's mercy and resets

our hearts on the mystery of his death and resurrection. Our daily worship unites us with the Lord, who gives us the grace we need to pattern our lives on his teaching and example.

“Arriving early for **Mass** allows me to get **an hour with God.**”

—Geraldine G.

Celebrating the Liturgical Seasons

The liturgical year takes us through five seasons—Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time. “In the Liturgical Year,” says the *US Catechism for Adults*, “the Church celebrates the whole mystery of Christ from the Incarnation until the day of Pentecost and the expectation of Christ’s second coming. . . . The presence of the Risen Lord and his saving work permeates the entire Liturgical Year: Advent, the Christmas Season, Lent, the Easter Season, and Ordinary Time.”⁵ The Sunday liturgies announce the themes for each season and the daily Masses develop them and apply them to our lives.

Advent

The liturgical year begins with Advent, which is marked by four consecutive Sundays from the one nearest to November 30 to the one before Christmas Day. The season prepares our hearts to welcome three comings of Jesus. Both the Christian and secular traditions focus us on Christ’s first coming among us at Christmas. The season also anticipates his second coming at the end of time. Finally, woven

through the Sunday and weekday liturgies of Advent is the Lord's coming to make his home in each of us (see Jn 14:23). It is a joyful time of prayer and of making room for Christ in our lives.

A Season of Devout and Expectant Delight

Advent has a twofold character, for it is a time of preparation for the Solemnities of Christmas, in which the First Coming of the Son of God to humanity is remembered, and likewise a time, when by remembrance of this, minds and hearts are led to look forward to Christ's Second Coming at the end of time. For these two reasons, Advent is a period of devout and expectant delight.⁶

—"Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar"

Christmas Season

This season extends from Christmas Day until the Sunday after the Epiphany. On the feast of the Nativity, we celebrate Jesus' first coming, the startling reality that God came among us as a baby. Pope Benedict XVI said that "God made himself small so that we could understand him, welcome him, and love him." We may be surprised that during Christmas time we acknowledge Jesus' Second Coming as king of all to wrap up history at the end of time. The season climaxes with the Epiphany, remembering the visit of the Magi to the baby king, which represents his coming for all humankind.

God Comes as a Baby

God makes himself small for us. This is how he reigns. He does not come with power and outward splendor. He comes as a baby—defenseless and in need of our help. He does not want to overwhelm us with his strength. He takes away our fear of his greatness. He asks for our love: so he makes himself a child. God made himself small so that we could understand him, welcome him, and love him. Let us allow our heart, our soul, and our mind to be touched by this fact.⁷

—Pope Benedict XVI

“The greatest benefit of **daily Mass** has been the **closeness I’ve felt to the Lord**. It’s difficult to drift away from him, spiritually or morally, when you unite with him each morning, body to body, soul to soul. Daily Mass has become an **anchor in my life** that keeps me from sailing off to a ‘distant country’ (see Lk 15:13).”

—Brandon V.

Lent

Lent runs from Ash Wednesday until the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. "Lent" derives from a Germanic word that means "spring." As at root, the word "Lent" indicates a time of new life; it stands as an appropriate name for this season that prepares candidates for the new life of baptism at the Easter Vigil. It calls all Christians to repentance in preparation for renewing their life in Christ at Easter.

Many Catholics celebrate this penitential season by rearranging their schedule so they can worship at daily Mass. During the first three weeks, the daily liturgies instruct us in the ways of repentance—prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (see Mt 1–6, 16–18)—and lead us to reform our lives. The Masses of the second three weeks, which reach a peak in Holy Week, immerse us daily in the events leading to the passion and death of the Lord. These days draw us to Jesus and infuse us with love and devotion for him.

Turning Lenten Penance Outward

Right at the beginning of Lent, on the Friday after Ash Wednesday, the liturgy turns our inward penance outward to works of mercy with this reading:

Is this not . . . the fast that I choose:
releasing those bound unjustly,
untying the thongs of the yoke;
Setting free the oppressed,
breaking off every yoke?
Is it not sharing your bread with the hungry,
bringing the afflicted and the homeless into your
house;

Clothing the naked when you see them,
and not turning your back on your own flesh?
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn. . . .
and your wound shall quickly be healed;
Your vindication shall go before you,
and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

—Isaiah 58:6-8

Easter

Lent culminates in Easter. Easter begins with the Sacred Triduum, which is Latin for “three days.” It refers to the three most important days of the liturgical year: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, which climaxes in the celebration of the Lord’s resurrection at the Easter Vigil. “Christ redeemed us all,” says the *Ceremonial of Bishops*, “and gave perfect glory to God principally through his paschal mystery: dying he destroyed our death, rising he restored our life. Therefore, the Easter Triduum of the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord is the culmination of the entire liturgical year.”⁸ If you are only able to attend daily Mass occasionally, you cannot afford to miss participating in the liturgies of these three special days.

Easter time extends for fifty days, from Easter Sunday until Pentecost. The famous line from St. Augustine—“We are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song”—expresses the joyful spirit of the season’s daily Masses.

Endless Easter

Christ the Victor over death,
Breathes on us the Spirit's breath!
Paradise is our reward,
Endless Easter with our Lord.⁹

Ordinary Time

Ordinary Time occurs in two periods. The first part of the season runs between the Epiphany and Ash Wednesday. It picks up again on the Monday after Pentecost and continues until the First Sunday of Advent. On Sundays, this season draws us into the fullness of the mystery of Christ, and the daily Masses foster our growth in the Christian life. They lead us to repentance, surrender to God, and the experience of his love.

"I go primarily because I want to
worship Jesus in the way he
established as the summit of our faith.
Liturgical worship in the Mass is the
primary way that I can **respond to**
God with thanksgiving
and gratitude for his

immeasurable, magnanimous gift of redemption and reconciliation.”

—Mike M.

As you reflect on this running summary of the liturgical seasons, I hope you will decide to worship at daily Mass. If you can't make it every day, choose one or two days that fit your schedule. I assure you that you will experience the power of daily Mass. As the *Ceremonial of Bishops* says, “The celebration of the liturgical year possesses a distinct sacramental force and efficacy because Christ himself in his mysteries . . . continues his mission of infinite mercy. Therefore his faithful people not only recall and contemplate the mysteries of redemption, but also lay hold of them, enter into communion with them, and live by them.”¹⁰

Comprehension and Discussion Questions

1. How do the events remembered in the liturgical year differ from other historical events?
2. How does the liturgical year bring us into a daily relationship with Jesus?
3. What three comings of Christ do we celebrate in Advent?
4. Why does Pope Benedict XVI say Christ made himself small to come to us?
5. What is the Sacred Triduum? Why does the Church describe it as the summit of the liturgical year?