

How The Kalendar Teaches the Faith

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The Church follows two calendars simultaneously. First, she developed her liturgical year, as registered in the Proper of the Season. When dating by the calendar months became customary, she also developed her system of immovable Feasts in honour of the Saints. And we refer to this combination of moveable and immovable Feasts, this union of the Church's Year and the civil calendar, as the *Church Kalendar*...Each Churchman is expected to know the Church Year, just as he knows the chief anniversary dates of his own family, without having them in a printed form.

After the death and resurrection of our Lord, the event which every Christian wished to celebrate was Christ's Easter victory over pain, death, and sin. "This is the day which the Lord hath made" was the passage from the Psalms which seemed to describe Easter Day. Straightway they called the first day of the week "The Lord's Day," and celebrated it as the weekly Feast of our Lord's resurrection. The yearly anniversary of Easter they kept for fifty days, ending with the Feast of Pentecost (or Whitsunday) in honour of the Holy Ghost. For Easter came at the time of the Jewish Feast of the Passover which after fifty days was followed by the Jewish Pentecost. In preparation for Easter, they kept a solemn commemoration of the Passion, which finally grew into Lent and Passiontide. Eventually they instituted a commemoration of the coming of Christ, first in the form of the Feast of Epiphany, later still as the Feast of his Nativity, on December 25th, just nine months after March 25th, the Feast of the Annunciation (which traditionally is also the calendar month date of the Crucifixion). By the time the immovable Feast of Christmas had been accepted, the Church found herself committed to the calendar month system in addition to her calendar of moveable Feasts.

Thus the liturgical year developed into three main cycles, in honour of the three central mysteries of the Catholic religion. A moment's thought makes clear that all Catholic doctrine is focussed in three concentric mysteries, (a) the mystery of God (namely, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity), (b) the mystery of the Incarnation (which is the manifestation of God to us), and (c) the mystery of the Church or of Sanctification (which reveals to us how we are to attain God and his holiness).

Of course, these ideas overlap and are constantly repeated in the Church Year. Even in Passiontide the Church does not use a chronological method. Rather, she takes a theme and illustrates it from many different angles, shewing thereby the inter-relationship and unity of the Faith. The Church Year is like a great musical composition, its main theme being thanksgiving (or Eucharist) for God's goodness, with the minor themes of the three mysteries being developed in and through each other.

The Church begins with the manifestation of God to the world in the Person of Christ. First comes Advent, with its setting forth of the three themes of preparation - (a) the preparation of humanity for Christ's first advent to the world, (b) the preparation of the Church for his second advent by a consideration of the four last things (death, judgement, heaven, and hell), and (c) the preparation of the individual soul for the coming of Christ in the Christmas Communion. As a season of penitence the Advent colour is violet.

Then comes the white of Christmas with its midnight, dawn, and midday Masses, so tender and human in their appeal, followed by three Feasts which remind one of the passion which Christians must share - (a) the Martyr (exemplified in St. Stephen) who suffers unto death, (b) the stalwart servant (exemplified in the Beloved Disciple) who testifies throughout a long life of service, and (c) the many (exemplified in the Holy Innocents) who suffer unknowingly and without choice but who nevertheless are part of Christ's glorious heritage of weakness made into eternal triumph. The Octave Day shews us the divine Babe shedding his first blood (the Circumcision). On January 6th under the title of the Epiphany we celebrate the manifestation of Christ's divinity made to humanity in the coming of the Magi, in his Baptism, and in his first miracle. The Christmas season does not really end until the Purification (Feb. 2nd), theoretically forty days after the Nativity, and constituting the first course of forty days in the Church Year.

But after the Epiphany Octave begins the ferial season known as Epiphanytide, which uses green as does Trinitytide, and does not end unto Septuagesima comes with its violet of penitence.

Thus is the cycle of the Incarnation ended, and a new cycle begun, the cycle of redemption which manifests the mystery of sanctification, or as it is better called, the mystery of the Church. This cycle is the most interesting and varied of the three, with its tracing out of the suffering and victory of Christ, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the founding of the Church whereby is revealed to us the mystery of God and of his blessed will.

First there is an introduction, so that we may not leave the joys of Christmas too suddenly for the penance of Lent. This is the pre-Lenten (or *Gesima*) season of Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and Quinquagesima, approximately seventy, sixty, and fifty days before Easter. Then Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, and extends for another period of forty days (*i.e.*, not counting the Sundays which are never fast days) through Passiontide and Holy Week, and issues in the Queen of Feasts, the yearly anniversary of Christ's Resurrection. Then comes the Great Forty Days (when Christ again walked the earth), ending in the Ascension of Christ. But Eastertide itself does not end until Pentecost (fifty days) is finished with its Octave Day of Trinity Sunday whereon we worship God in his final revelation of himself.

The foregoing cycle has been violet with penitence (from Septuagesima till Easter, except for the black of Good Friday) and white in honour of Christ the Immaculate, except for the red which is used for the fire of the Holy Spirit during Whitsuntide. Trinity Sunday is also white, as is the Feast on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, Corpus Christi, the day whereon the revelation of the mystery of God is seen to be completed and fulfilled in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

Trinitytide is the third cycle, and deals with the mystery of God and his blessed will in our lives. It uses green on Ferias, as did Epiphanytide, and ends with the Sunday Next before Advent, when the glorious worship of the Church in the three cycles of the mysteries of our Faith is begun again.

But all through these three cycles come the immoveable Feasts with their presentation of heroic servants of Christ (the Apostles and Evangelists, the Martyrs, the Confessors, the Virgins, the Holy Women) and many commemorations of mysteries or of titles of our Lord and our Lady, such as the Precious Blood or the Seven Sorrows. For all Feasts in honour of martyrdom the Church uses red. For other Feasts white.

The moveable Feasts, which so often occur throughout the year, may seem to interrupt this gradual unfolding of the three-fold mystery of our Faith (*i.e.*, the doctrine of God, the Incarnation, and the Church). But if we see the moveable Feasts against the background of the Season, and thus think of them as evidence of the Faith expressed in human life and action, they serve to illustrate and illuminate this three-fold mystery. And let it not be forgotten that we, as Catholic Christians, are an integral part of this mystery, for St. Paul says that the Church is "the fellowship of the mystery".