

# General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar

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### Chapter I: The Liturgical Year

1. Christ's saving work is celebrated in sacred memory by the Church on fixed days throughout the year. Each week on the day called the Lord's Day the Church commemorates the Lord's resurrection. Once a year at Easter the Church honors this resurrection and passion with the utmost solemnity. In fact through the yearly cycle the Church unfolds the entire mystery of Christ and keeps the anniversaries of the saints.

During the different seasons of the liturgical year, the Church, in accord with traditional discipline, carries out the formation of the faithful by means of devotional practices, both interior and exterior, instruction, and works of penance and mercy.<sup>1</sup>

2. The principles given here may and must be applied to both the Roman Rite and all others; but the practical rules are to be taken as pertaining solely to the Roman Rite, except in matters that of their nature also affect the other rites.<sup>2</sup>

### Part 1: Liturgical Days

#### I. The Liturgical Day in General

3. Each day is made holy through the liturgical celebrations of the people of God, especially through the eucharistic sacrifice and the divine office. The liturgical day runs from midnight to midnight, but the observance of Sunday and solemnities begins with the evening of the preceding day.

#### II. Sunday

4. The Church celebrates the paschal mystery on the first day of the week, known as the Lord's Day or Sunday. This follows a tradition handed down from the apostles and having its origin from the day of Christ's resurrection. Thus Sunday must be ranked as the first holyday of all.<sup>3</sup>

5. Because of its special importance, the Sunday celebration gives way only to solemnities or feasts of the Lord. The Sundays of the seasons of Advent, Lent, and Easter, however, take precedence over all solemnities and feasts of the Lord. Solemnities occurring on these Sundays are observed on the Saturdays preceding.

6. By its nature, Sunday excludes any other celebration's being permanently assigned to that day, with these exceptions:

- a. Sunday within the octave of Christmas is the feast of the Holy Family;
- b. Sunday following 6 January is the feast of the Baptism of the Lord;
- c. Sunday after Pentecost is the solemnity of the Holy Trinity;
- d. the last Sunday in Ordinary Time is the solemnity of Christ the King.

7. In those places where the solemnities of Epiphany, Ascension, and Corpus Christi are not observed as holydays of obligation, they are assigned to a Sunday, which is then considered their proper day in calendar. Thus:

- a. Epiphany, to the Sunday falling between 2 January and 8 January;
- b. Ascension, to the Seventh Sunday of Easter;
- c. the solemnity of Corpus Christi, to the Sunday after Trinity Sunday.

#### III. Solemnities, Feasts, and Memorials

8. As it celebrates the mystery of Christ in yearly cycle, the Church also venerates with a particular love Mary, the Mother of God, and sets before the devotion of the faithful the memory of the martyrs and other saints.<sup>4</sup>

9. The saints of universal significance have celebrations obligatory throughout the entire Church. Other saints either are listed in the General Calendar for optional celebration or are left to the veneration of some particular Church, region, or

religious family.<sup>5</sup>

10. According to their importance, celebrations are distinguished from each other and named as follows: solemnities, feasts, memorials.

11. Solemnities are counted as the principal days in the calendar and their observance begins with evening prayer I of the preceding day. Some also have their own vigil Mass for use when Mass is celebrated in the evening of the preceding day. The celebration of Easter and Christmas, the two greatest solemnities, continues for eight days, with each octave governed by its own rules.

13. Feasts are celebrated within the limits of the natural day and accordingly do not have evening prayer I. Exceptions are feasts of the Lord that fall on a Sunday in Ordinary Time and in the Christmas season and that replace the Sunday office.

14. Memorials are either obligatory or optional. Their observance is integrated into the celebration of the occurring weekday in accord with the norms set forth in the General Instructions of the Roman Missal and the Liturgy of the Hours.

Obligatory memorials occurring on Lenten weekdays may only be celebrated as optional memorials.

Should more than one optional memorial fall on the same day, only one may be celebrated; the others are omitted.

15. On Saturdays in Ordinary Time when there is no obligatory memorial, an optional memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary is allowed.

#### **IV. Weekdays**

16. The days following Sundays are called weekdays. They are celebrated in different ways according to the importance each one has.

- a. Ash Wednesday and the days of Holy Week, from Monday to Thursday inclusive, have precedence over all other celebrations.
- b. The weekdays of Advent from 17 December to 24 December inclusive and all the weekdays of Lent have precedence over obligatory memorials.
- c. All other weekdays give way to solemnities and feasts and are combined with memorials.

#### **Part 2: The Yearly Cycle**

17. By means of the yearly cycle the Church celebrates the whole mystery of Christ, from his incarnation until the day of Pentecost and the expectation of his coming again.<sup>6</sup>

##### **I. Easter Triduum**

18. Christ redeemed us all and gave perfect glory to God principally through his paschal mystery: dying he destroyed our death and rising he restored our life. Therefore the Easter triduum of the passion and resurrection of Christ is the culmination of the entire liturgical year.<sup>7</sup> Thus the solemnity of Easter has the same kind of preeminence in the liturgical year that Sunday has in the week.<sup>8</sup>

19. The Easter triduum begins with the evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, reaches its high point in the Easter Vigil, and closes with evening prayer on Easter Sunday.

20. On Good Friday<sup>9</sup> and, if possible, also on Holy Saturday until the Easter Vigil,<sup>10</sup> the Easter fast is observed everywhere.

21. The Easter Vigil, during the holy night when Christ rose from the dead, ranks as the "the mother of all vigils."<sup>11</sup> Keeping watch, the Church awaits Christ's resurrection and celebrates it in the sacraments. Accordingly, the entire celebration of this vigil should take place at night, that is, should either begin after nightfall or end before the dawn of Sunday.

##### **II. Easter Season**

22. The fifty days from Easter Sunday to Pentecost are celebrated in joyful exultation as one feast day, or better as one "great Sunday."<sup>12</sup> These above all others are the days for the singing of the Alleluia.

23. The Sundays of this season rank as the paschal Sundays and, after Easter Sunday itself, are called the Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Sundays of Easter. The period of fifty sacred days ends on Pentecost Sunday.

24. The first eight days of the Easter season make up the octave of Easter and are celebrated as solemnities of the Lord.

25. On the fortieth day after Easter the Ascension is celebrated, except in places where, not being a holyday of obligation, it has been transferred to the Seventh Sunday of Easter (see no. 7).

26. The weekdays after the Ascension until the Saturday before Pentecost inclusive are a preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

### **III. Lent**

27. Lent is a preparation for the celebration of Easter. For the Lenten liturgy disposes both catechumens and the faithful to celebrate the paschal mystery: catechumens, through the several stages of Christian initiation; the faithful, through reminders of their own baptism and through penitential practices.<sup>13</sup>

28. Lent runs from Ash Wednesday until the Mass of the Lord's Supper exclusive. The Alleluia is not used from the beginning of Lent until the Easter Vigil.

29. On Ash Wednesday, a universal day of fast,<sup>14</sup> ashes are distributed.

30. The Sundays of this season are called the First, Second, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent. The Sixth Sunday, which marks the beginning of Holy Week, is called Passion Sunday (Palm Sunday).

31. Holy Week has as its purpose the remembrance of Christ's passion, beginning with his Messianic entrance into Jerusalem. At the chrisom Mass on Holy Thursday morning the bishop, concelebrating Mass with his body of priests, blesses the oils and consecrates the chrisom.

### **IV. Christmas Season**

32. Next to the yearly celebration of the paschal mystery, the Church holds most sacred the memorial of Christ's birth and early manifestations. This is the purpose of the Christmas season.

33. The Christmas season runs from evening prayer I of Christmas until the Sunday after Epiphany or after 6 January, inclusive.

34. The Mass of the vigil of Christmas is used in the evening of 24 December, either before or after evening prayer I.

On Christmas itself, following an ancient tradition of Rome, three Masses may be celebrated: namely, the Mass at Midnight, the Mass at Dawn, and the Mass during the Day.

35. Christmas has its own octave, arranged as follows:

- a. Sunday within the octave is the feast of the Holy Family;
- b. 26 December is the feast of Saint Stephen, First Martyr;
- c. 27 December is the feast of Saint John, Apostle and Evangelist;
- d. 28 December is the feast of the Holy Innocents;
- e. 29, 30, and 31 December are days within the octave;
- f. 1 January, the octave day of Christmas, is the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. It also recalls the conferral of the holy Name of Jesus.

36. The Sunday falling between 2 January and 5 January is the Second Sunday after Christmas.

37. Epiphany is celebrated on 6 January, unless (where it is not observed as a holyday of obligation) it has been assigned to the Sunday occurring between 2 January and 8 January (see no. 7).

38. The Sunday falling after 6 January is the feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

## **V. Advent**

39. Advent has a twofold character: as a season to prepare for Christmas when Christ's first coming to us is remembered; as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ's Second Coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation.

40. Advent begins with evening prayer I of the Sunday falling on or closest to 30 November and ends before evening prayer I of Christmas.

41. The Sundays of this season are named the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Sundays of Advent.

The weekdays from 17 December to 24 December inclusive serve to prepare more directly for the Lord's birth.

## **VI. Ordinary Time**

43. Apart from those seasons having their own distinctive character, thirty-three or thirty-four weeks remain in the yearly cycle that do not celebrate a specific aspect of the mystery of Christ. Rather, especially on the Sundays, they are devoted to the mystery of Christ in all its aspects. This period is known as Ordinary Time.

44. Ordinary Time begins on Monday after the Sunday following 6 January and continues until Tuesday before Ash Wednesday inclusive. It begins again on Monday after Pentecost and ends before evening prayer I of the First Sunday of Advent.

This is also the reason for the series of liturgical texts found in both the Roman Missal and The Liturgy of the Hours (Vol. III-IV), for Sundays and weekdays in this season.

## **VII. Rogation and Ember Days**

45. On rogation and ember days the practice of the Church is to offer prayers to the Lord for the needs of all people, especially for the productivity of the earth and for human labor, and to give him public thanks.

46. In order to adapt the rogation and ember days to various regions and the different needs of the people, the conferences of bishops should arrange the time and plan for their celebration.

Consequently, the competent authority should lay down norms, in view of local conditions, on extending such celebrations over one or several days and on repeating them during the year.

47. On each day of these celebrations the Mass should be one of the votive Masses for various needs and occasions that is best suited for the intentions of the petitioners.

## **Chapter II, Part 1: Calendar and Celebrations to be Entered**

48. The arrangement for celebrating the liturgical year is governed by the calendar: the General Calendar, for use in the entire Roman Rite, or a particular calendar, for use in a particular Church or in families of religious.

49. In the General Calendar the entire cycle of celebrations is entered: celebrations of the mystery of salvation as found in the Proper of the Seasons, of those saints having universal significance who must therefore be celebrated by everyone or of saints who show the universality and continuity of holiness within the people of God.

Particular calendars have more specialized celebrations, arranged to harmonize with the general cycle.<sup>15</sup> The individual Churches or families of religious should show a special honor to those saints who are properly their own.

Particular calendars, drawn up by the competent authority, must be approved by the Apostolic See.

50. The drawing up of a particular calendar is to be guided by the following considerations:

- a. The Proper of Seasons (that is, the cycle of seasons, solemnities, and feasts that unfold and honor the mystery of

redemption during the liturgical year) must be kept intact and retain its rightful preeminence over particular celebrations.

- b. Particular celebrations must be coordinated harmoniously with the universal celebrations, with care for the Liturgical Days. Least particular calendars be enlarged disproportionately, individual saints may have only one feast in the liturgical year. For persuasive pastoral reasons there may be another celebration in the form of an optional memorial marking the transfer or discovery of the bodies of patrons or founders of Churches or of families of religious.
- c. Feasts granted by indult may not duplicate other celebrations already contained in the cycle of the mystery of salvation, nor may they be multiplied out of proportion.

51. Although it is reasonable for each diocese to have its own calendar and propers for the Mass and office, there is no reason why entire provinces, regions, countries, or even larger areas may not have common calendars and propers, prepared with the cooperation of all the parties involved.

This principle may also be followed in the case of the calendars for several provinces of religious within the same civil territory.

52. A particular calendar is prepared by inserting in the General Calendar special solemnities, feasts, and memorials proper to that calendar:

- a. in a diocesan calendar, in addition to celebrations of its patrons and the dedication of the cathedral, the saints and the blessed who bear some special connection with that diocese, for example, as their birthplace, residence over a long period, or place of death;
- b. in the calendar of religious, besides celebrations of their title, founder, or patron, those saints and blessed who were members of that religious family or had some special relationship with it.
- c. in a calendar for individual churches, celebrations proper to a diocese or religious community, those celebrations that are proper to that church and are listed in the Table of Liturgical Days and also the saints who are buried in that church. Members of religious communities should join with the community of the local Church in celebrating the anniversary of the dedication of the cathedral and the principle patrons of the place and of the larger region where they live.

53. When a diocese or religious family has the distinction of having many saints and blessed, care must be taken not to overload the calendar of the entire diocese or institute. Consequently:

- a. The first measure that can be taken is to have a common feast of all the saints and the blessed of a given diocese or religious family or of some category.
- b. Only the saints and blessed of particular significance for an entire diocese or religious family may be entered in the calendar with an individual celebration.
- c. The other saints or blessed are to be celebrated only in those places with which they have closer ties or where their bodies are buried.

54. Proper celebrations should be entered in the calendar as obligatory or optional memorials, unless other provisions have been made for them in the Table of Liturgical Days or there are special historical or pastoral reasons. But there is no reason why some celebrations may not be observed with greater solemnity in some places than in the rest of the diocese or religious community.

55. Celebrations entered in a particular calendar must be observed by all who are bound to follow that calendar. Only with the approval of the Apostolic See may celebrations be removed from a calendar or changed in rank.

## **Part 2: The Proper Date for Celebrations**

56. The Church's practice has been to celebrate the saints on the date of their death ("birthday"), a practice it would be well to follow when entering proper celebrations in particular calendars.

Even though proper celebrations have special importance for individual local Churches or religious families, it is of great

advantage that there be as much unity as possible in the observance of solemnities, feasts, and obligatory memorials listed in the General Calendar.

In entering proper celebrations in a particular calendar, therefore, the following are to be observed:

- a. Celebrations listed in the General Calendar are to be entered on the same date in a particular calendar, with a change in rank of celebration if necessary.

This also applies to diocesan or religious calendars when celebrations proper to an individual church alone are added.

- b. Celebrations for saints not included in the General Calendar should be assigned to the date of their death. If the date of death is not known, the celebrations should be assigned to a date associated with the saint on some other grounds, such as the date of ordination or of the discovery or transfer of the saint's body; otherwise it is celebrated on a date unimpeded by other celebrations in that particular calendar.
- c. If the date of death or other appropriate date is impeded in the General Calendar or in a particular calendar by another obligatory celebration, even of lower rank, the celebrations should be assigned to the closest date not so impeded.
- d. If, however, it is a question of celebrations that cannot be transferred to another date because of pastoral reasons, the impeding celebration should itself be transferred.
- e. Other celebrations, called feasts granted by indult, should be entered on a date more pastorally appropriate.
- f. The cycle of the liturgical year should stand out with its full preeminence, but at the same time the celebration of the saints should not be permanently impeded. Therefore, dates that most of the time fall during Lent and the octave of Easter, as well as the weekdays between 17 December and 31 December, should remain free of any particular celebration, unless it is a question of optional memorials, feasts found in the Table of Liturgical Days under no. 8 a, b, c, d, or solemnities that cannot be transferred to another season.

The solemnity of Saint Joseph (19 March), except where it is observed as a holyday of obligation, may be transferred by the conferences of bishops to another day outside Lent.

57. If some saints or blessed are listed in the calendar on the same date, they are always celebrated together whenever they are of equal rank, even though one or more of them may be more proper to that calendar. If one or other of these saints or blessed is to be celebrated with a higher rank, that office alone is observed and the others are omitted, unless it is appropriate to assign them to another date in the form of an obligatory memorial.

58. For the pastoral advantage of the people, it is permissible to observe on the Sundays in Ordinary Time those celebrations that fall during the week and have special appeal to the devotion of the faithful, provided the celebrations take precedence over these Sundays in the Table of Liturgical Days. The Mass for such celebrations may be used at all the Masses at which a congregation is present.

59. Precedence among liturgical days relative to the celebration is governed solely by the following table.

### **Table of Liturgical Days**

- I
  1. Easter triduum of the Lord's passion and resurrection.
  2. Christmas, Epiphany, Ascension, and Pentecost.  
Sundays of Advent, Lent, and the Easter season.  
Ash Wednesday.  
Weekdays of Holy Week from Monday to Thursday inclusive.  
Days within the octave of Easter.
  3. Solemnities of the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and saints listed in the General Calendar.  
All Souls.
  4. Proper Solemnities, namely:
    - a. Solemnity of the principal patron of the place, that is, the city or state.
    - b. Solemnity of the dedication of a particular church and the anniversary.
    - c. Solemnity of the title, or of the founder, or of the principal patron of a religious order or con-
- II
  5. Feasts of the Lord in the General Calendar.
  6. Sundays of the Christmas season and Sundays in Ordinary Time.
  7. Feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the saints in the General Calendar.
  8. Proper feasts, namely:
    - a. Feast of the principal patron of the diocese.
    - b. Feast of the anniversary of the dedication of the cathedral.
    - c. Feast of the principal patron of a region or province, or a country, or of a wider territory.
    - d. Feast of the title, founder, or principle patron of an order or congregation and of a religious province, without prejudice to the directives in no. 4.
    - e. Other feasts proper to an individual church.
    - f. Other feasts listed in the calendar of a diocese or of a religious order or congregation.
  9. Weekdays of Advent from 17 December to 24 December inclusive.  
Days within the octave of Christmas.
- III
  10. Obligatory memorials in the General Calendar.
  11. Proper obligatory memorials, namely:
    - a. Memorial of a secondary patron of the place, diocese, region, or province, country or wider territory, or of an order or congregation and of a religious province.
    - b. Obligatory memorials listed in the calendar of a diocese, or of an order or congregation.
  12. Optional memorials; but these may be celebrated even on the days listed in no. 9, in the special manner described by the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and of the Liturgy of the Hours.  
  
In the same manner obligatory memorials may be celebrated as optional memorials if they happen to fall on the Lenten weekdays.
  13. Weekdays of Advent up to 16 December inclusive.  
Weekdays of the Christmas season from 2 January until the Saturday after Epiphany.  
Weekdays of the Easter season from Monday after the octave of Easter until the Saturday before Pentecost inclusive.  
Weekdays in Ordinary Time.

60. If several celebrations fall on the same day, the one that holds the highest rank according to the preceding Table of Liturgical Days is observed. But a solemnity impeded by a liturgical day that takes precedence over it should be transferred to the closest day not listed in nos. 1-8 in the table of precedence; the rule of no. 5 remains in effect. Other celebrations are omitted that year.

61. If the same day were to call for celebration of evening prayer of that day's office and evening prayer I of the following day, evening prayer of the day with the higher rank in the Table of Liturgical Days takes precedence; in cases of equal rank, evening prayer of the actual day takes precedence.

#### Endnotes

1. Second Vatican Council, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, Sacrosanctum Concilium, art. 102-105.
2. *ibid.*, art. 5.
3. *ibid.*, art. 106.
4. *ibid.*, art. 103-104.
5. *ibid.*, art. 111.
6. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, Sacrosanctum Concilium, art. 102.
7. *ibid.*, art. 5.
8. *ibid.*, art. 106.
9. Paul VI, *Apostolic Constitution Paenitemini*, Feb. 17, 1966, II,3.
10. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, Sacrosanctum Concilium, art. 110.
11. Augustine, Sermo 219: PL 38, 1088.
12. Athanasius, Epist. fest. 1: PG 26, 1366.
13. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, Sacrosanctum Concilium, art. 109.
14. Paul VI, *Apostolic Constitution Paenitemini*, II §3.
15. Congregation for Divine Worship, instruction *Calendaria particularia*, June 24, 1970.