

“Year of the Eucharist”—Ranking Church Days (Part 3) Seasons, Memorials & Weekdays by Fr. Steve Lape



Let's look at the top Church days, from highest to lowest importance:

1--Easter Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday, with the Easter Vigil on that Holy Saturday night being the most important Mass of the whole Church year, followed by the Easter Sunday Masses), 2—

Sundays (the Lord's Resurrection day),

3--other Solemnities,

4--the days of Holy Week (Holy Monday through Holy Wednesday),

5—the Octave of Easter (the 8 days spanning from Easter Sunday through the 2nd Sunday of Easter),

6—Feasts,

7—the weekdays of Advent between Dec. 17 and Dec. 24 (the week before Christmas),

8—the Octave of Christmas (8 days from Christmas Day through Jan. 1st—Mary, Mother of God),

9—weekdays of Lent,

10—obligatory memorials,

11—optional memorials,

12—Advent weekdays (through Dec. 16th),

13—regular Christmas season weekdays,

14—regular Easter season weekdays, and

15—Ordinary Time weekdays (called “ferial” days, on which no special feast day is celebrated).

All of these days point to the mystery of God's salvation plan throughout history, with the peak being Jesus' life, death & Resurrection. Some highlight certain aspects of that salvation plan more than others, which is why some are emphasized more than others.

As this hierarchy shows, there are several seasons on the Church's calendar. Lent & Advent (represented by purple) prepare us for Easter and Christmas respectively. Lent originally was 40 days (including Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday and not including Sundays of Lent) to commemorate the 40 years of the Israelites' sojourn through the desert to the Promised Land, as well as reminding us of Jesus' fasting for 40 days in the desert, while being tempted by the devil (see Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13, and Mark 1:12-13). Nowadays, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday are seen apart from Lent and Holy Week, more importantly designated as parts of the Sacred Triduum (meaning a span of 3 days), which also includes Easter Sunday and is seen as one continuous celebration. Advent begins on the Sunday closest to the feast of St. Andrew the Apostle (Nov. 30th) and ends on Christmas Eve at the Vigil Mass. The Easter season (represented by white) runs from Easter Sunday through Pentecost Sunday (the birthday of the Church), a span of 50 days. (Pentecost comes from a Greek word meaning “50th.”) Christmas (also white) runs from Christmas day through the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Ordinary Time (represented by green) is outside those 4 seasons.

Memorial days spotlight particular saints (not including Mary and the Apostles, or martyred deacons Stephen or Lawrence) who have impacted the world so significantly that they're put on the general Church calendar for special Mass celebrations. Obligatory memorials include special prayers honoring certain saints (sometimes with special Bible readings), while other saints of more localized or lesser known significance are given optional memorials. However, memorials occurring during Lent are always relegated to optional status.

