**The Liturgical Year**

*In the Liturgical Year, 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 summit of the Liturgical Year is the Easter Triduum – from the evening of Holy Thursday to the evening of Easter Sunday. Though chronologically three days, they are liturgically one day unfolding for us the unity of Christ’s Paschal Mystery. 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*.

– *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, p. 173

The Liturgical Year sanctifies our earthly time. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, reads: “Recalling thus the mysteries of redemption, 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” (*SC*, no. 102). The Church, by the power of the Holy Spirit, makes present to us the mysteries of our redemption. We are not “at a distance” from Christ since He lived His earthly life 2000 years ago; rather, through the Church, these mysteries are made present to us here and now. The seasons and feasts of the Liturgical Year are meant to become the very rhythm of our whole lives.

The new Liturgical Year begins with the season of Advent (from the Latin adventus, meaning “coming” or “coming to”). It is fitting that we begin the Liturgical Year preparing for the Birth of Christ. The season of Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas Day, and so the First Sunday of Advent falls either at the end of November or the very beginning of December. During Advent, we prepare for the celebration of the birth of Christ (His First Coming), and also prepare for His coming again at the end of time (His Second Coming). Preface I of Advent discusses these two comings:

For he assumed at his first coming the lowliness of human flesh,   
 and so fulfilled the design you formed long ago,  
 and opened for us the way to eternal salvation,  
 that, when he comes again in glory and majesty and all is at last made manifest,  
 we who watch for that day may inherit the great promise in which now we dare to hope.

Advent is followed by the Christmas Season, which begins with Christmas and concludes on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord (celebrated on the third Sunday after Christmas). The Collect (Opening Prayer) for Christmas Mass During the Day draws our attention to the profound reality of the Incarnation celebrated during this season:

O God, who wonderfully created the dignity of human nature  
 and still more wonderfully restored it,  
 grant, we pray, that we may share in the divinity of Christ,  
 who humbled himself to share in our humanity.   
 Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

There is then a period of Ordinary Time (more on Ordinary Time below). In February or early March (depending on the date of Easter), Ash Wednesday begins the Lenten Season, the period of preparation for the celebration of the Paschal Mystery. The Collect for the Third Sunday of Lent directs our attention to the three pillars of Lent:

O God, author of every mercy and of all goodness,  
 who in fasting, prayer, and almsgiving have shown us a remedy for sin,  
 look graciously on this confession of our lowliness,  
 that we, who are bowed down by our conscience,  
 may always be lifted up by your mercy.  
 Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
 who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

During Lent, we engage in an intensified practice of the three pillars of the spiritual life: fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. Through fasting (self-denial), by God’s grace, we are detached from the passing things of the world which can never satisfy our true hunger and longing; through prayer, we turn to God and cling to Him more fully, recognizing Him as the center of our lives; through almsgiving, our love for God expresses itself in our love of neighbor, turning us outward and away from the selfishness and narrowness of sin.

Lent concludes on the evening of Holy Thursday, which is the beginning of the most important liturgical season: the *Triduum* (meaning “three days”). The *Triduum* begins with the Mass of the Lord’s Supper and concludes with Evening Prayer on Easter Sunday: Thursday evening to Friday evening (day 1), Friday evening to Saturday evening (day 2), Saturday evening to Sunday evening (day 3). This is the high point of the Liturgical Year:

*Easter*is not simply one feast among others, but the "Feast of feasts," the "Solemnity of solemnities," just as the Eucharist is the "Sacrament of sacraments" (the Great Sacrament). St. Athanasius calls Easter "the Great Sunday"43 and the Eastern Churches call Holy Week "the Great Week." The mystery of the Resurrection, in which Christ crushed death, permeates with its powerful energy our old time, until all is subjected to him (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1169).

The Easter Season extends 50 days (this length of time conveys the abundance of joy!), concluding with Pentecost Sunday, when the Holy Spirit came upon the Church and the Apostles began the work of preaching the Gospel to all nations. In and through His Church, Christ calls all humanity back to Himself:

Almighty ever-living God, who willed the Paschal Mystery to be encompassed as a sign in fifty days,  
grant that from out of the scattered nations the confusion of many tongues   
may be gathered by heavenly grace into one great confession of your name.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever (Collect for the Vigil of Pentecost – Simple Form).

At the Tower of Babel (see Genesis 11), the human race was scattered by sin and the confusion of languages: through the Paschal Mystery, the scattering and confusion of sin is conquered, and, in the unity of the Catholic Church, all are called to confess the glory of Christ in one voice.

Following Pentecost, Ordinary Time resumes. Ordinary Time is not ordinary in the sense of “uninteresting” but rather in the sense of “ordered” or “numbered” time:

The rhythm of the liturgical seasons reflects the rhythm of life — with its celebrations of anniversaries and its seasons of quiet growth and maturing.

Ordinary Time, meaning ordered or numbered time, is celebrated in two segments: from the Monday following the Baptism of Our Lord up to Ash Wednesday; and from Pentecost Monday to the First Sunday of Advent. This makes it the largest season of the Liturgical Year.

In vestments usually green, the color of hope and growth, the Church counts the thirty-three or thirty-four Sundays of Ordinary Time, inviting her children to meditate upon the whole mystery of Christ – his life, miracles and teachings – in the light of his Resurrection.

If the faithful are to mature in the spiritual life and increase in faith, they must descend the great mountain peaks of Easter and Christmas in order to "pasture" in the vast verdant meadows of *tempus per annum*, or Ordinary Time.

Sunday by Sunday, the Pilgrim Church marks her journey through the *tempus per annum* as she processes through time toward eternity ("What Is Ordinary Time?" *Catholic Culture*. N.p., n.d. Web. 20 Nov. 2014).

We should not view Ordinary Time as a time when nothing happens; rather, it is a time of “quiet growth and maturing.” Hence, Ordinary Time should never be overlooked or ignored: we are here given the opportunity for real growth. The great feasts of Christmas and Easter must take deep root in our hearts, permeating every dimension of our daily lives. Also, our faith calls us to reflect upon the entire mystery of Christ’s life. During Ordinary Time, we are led through the Gospels successively, reading of the miracles, teachings, and actions of Jesus Christ throughout His earthly ministry.