

Faith of Our Fathers

[A WEEKLY INSTRUCTION FOR YOUNG AND OLD.]

II. General View of the Liturgical Year.

8. This is not all. In addition to the festivals, properly so called, offices are daily celebrated in the Church, which, though of minor solemnity, give to each day a religious coloring, and make it a kind of festival in which the faithful may participate according to their leisure or devotion; so that, viewed as one magnificent whole, the ecclesiastical liturgy presents the aspect of a perpetual festival.

9. By the word liturgy is understood the order of religious ceremonies adopted by the Church; it may be said to be the compendium of the external worship prescribed and deposited by her in her official books, which are for that reason called liturgical books.

The principal of these books is that which is known to all, the Missal, which the priest uses in saying Mass, and in which the entire ecclesiastical year is unfolded, from Advent to All Saints—the beginning and end of it.

The liturgy is composed of a series of sacred offices relating to the various mysteries of religion, the periodical succession of which, extending over the entire year, is perpetuated through the course of ages.

In this liturgical cycle first appear the three great solemnities of Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas next come the different feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and those of the holy Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors, and Virgins; and finally the solemnity of All Saints, on which day we honor the whole multitude of the saints and blessed.

The few days that are not saints' days are, nevertheless, sanctified by offices proper to them, and are called *ferias*, from which name the Church would have her ministers to understand that, though they appear but ordinary days, they are given to them to be devoted to the praises of God.

10. We see, then, that the Church has fully made herself mistress of the time of the present life, which is the prelude to eternity. Knowing that time here below is only given to man as a pathway to lead him to his eternal country, she has divided this time into certain parts, as if into as many stages, broken by various festivals, to render the journey easier and more agreeable.

This division of time, marked by the ecclesiastical calendar, bears the impress of an admirable wisdom, and of the divine assistance of the Holy Ghost. It is based upon the division established by God Himself—the annual period and the weekly period.

11. The hebdomadary period, or the week, which is taken from the history of the creation of the world, represents the short duration of our mortal life—a life of labor and of sorrow—that will be followed by eternal rest in the house of the Lord. The Church sanctifies the days of the week by the holy day of Sunday. She goes so far as even to impress each individual day with a sacred character; so that the attentive Christian may every week behold the principal mysteries of his faith unfolded to his view. Thus, Sunday is especially consecrated to the Resurrection of our Lord; Friday, to His Passion; Thursday, to the mystery of the Blessed Eucharist; Saturday, to the Blessed Virgin; Monday, to the Blessed Trinity; Tuesday, to the holy Angels; and Wednesday, to the holy Apostles. This is indicated by the rules of the Missal, which reveal to us the mind of the Church.

12. The annual period, which is called the ecclesiastical year, rests upon the feasts of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, the three greatest solemnities, of which the most important is that of Easter, the movable centre of the whole liturgical order. These three solemnities remind us of the Three Persons of the Adorable Trinity. Christmas is, as it were, the festival of the infinite love of God the Father, who gives His only Son to the world; Easter, the festival of the infinite love of the Son of God, who dies for us on the Cross; and Pentecost is the festival of the infinite love of the Holy Ghost, the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, who communicates Himself to the Church.

The festivals of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost are like three cardinal points in the ecclesiastical liturgy. To

the festival of Christmas are linked the feasts of the Sacred Infancy and the hidden life of our Lord; to that of Easter, the mysteries of the public life, of the Passion and the Ascension; and with Pentecost are connected the mysteries of grace poured out by the Holy Ghost into the souls of men. The cycle of Pentecost is bound to that of Easter, and terminates with Advent.

During the period of about six months following the feast of Pentecost the eye of faith beholds the completion of the majestic construction of the Church, which, founded on the rock of truth, fructified by the blood of Christ, fortified by all the succors of grace and the helps of the Holy Spirit, constitutes, and will constitute to the end of time, the Ark of the New Covenant; that is to say, the ark of salvation for all who abandon themselves in a filial spirit to Providence with her pale.

13. The ecclesiastical year, then, we find is divided into three parts. The first of these comprises the four weeks of Advent preceding the nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and represents the four thousand years that preceded the coming of the Redeemer; the second part, from Christmas to the Ascension, retraces the mortal existence of our Lord when on earth; the third, namely, from Pentecost to All Saints—or rather up to the Sunday which closes the ecclesiastical year—represents the entire duration of the Church militant on earth, until the consummation of ages.

To the final solemnity of All Saints' succeed the Commemoration of the Dead, the Dedication of Churches, and the feast of Holy Relics, which, in like manner, bear reference to eternal life and to heaven.

We see, then, that the liturgical order, which represents to us the history of the world and the whole life of Christianity past, present, and future, terminates in the festivals of heaven, because, for the Christian, all tends to that happy consummation. Heaven, to the eyes of faith, is the watchword of existence.

14. What words can describe the beauty of our festivals, their harmony with the seasons at which they are celebrated, with the mysteries they recall, and the needs of our hearts? Let us for a moment suppose the festivals no longer to exist. Life and joy would have disappeared together with them; a dull monotony would reign throughout the year; the succession of days and seasons would become wearisome and insipid; and life, especially the Christian life, would become as it were impossible.

The solemnities of the Catholic Church, giving to each season of the year its joys and Christian feelings, are a necessity, and we are lifted by faith to that other world, where death shall be no more.

Such is the character of the Church festivals. They instruct, rejoice, fortify, and encourage; and by causing us to regard the Church on earth as an image of the Church in heaven, and, as it were, as the vestibule of paradise, they shed over this valley of tears a few rays of heavenly joy, and make the Christian life a prelude to a blessed eternity.

The Abbey Churches of England

Ampleforth's new abbey church, of which Cardinal Bourne laid the foundation stone during his recent visit to Yorkshire for Abbot President Smith's jubilee, will add yet another to the graceful abbey churches which are arising here and there in England, testifying eloquently to the failure of Henry VIII's policy of exterminating the monks. At Buckfast, Downside, Woolhampton (the home of the English Benedictines of Douai), Quarr, and Farnborough, just to take a few names at random, there are now fine abbey churches where the Benedictine tradition of being great builders is splendidly maintained. Ampleforth already has a fine church dating from the beginning of the 19th century but the new church promises to be on the scale of the fine abbeys for which Yorkshire was famous in past centuries.

"Reminiscences of Early Days in New Zealand."

Archbishop Redwood's *Reminiscences* is now on sale, and may be had from The Catholic Supplies, Manners Street, Wellington; O'Connor, Barbadoes Street, Christchurch; or N.Z. Tablet Office, Dunedin. It is a book that ought to be read in every home in New Zealand.

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