

Living Out the Liturgical Seasons Of the Catholic Church At St. Laurence

*There is an appointed time for everything,
And a time for every affair under the heavens. (Eccl 3:1)*

The Liturgical Year is a tool that kindles the hearts of Catholics so that they may recall God's marvelous plan of salvation accomplished through the birth, life, death and Resurrection of Christ. Reflective of nature, the Liturgical Seasons of the Church mark the ebb and flow of Catholic life, providing a time to grow, mourn, weep and celebrate in such a manner that the entire year becomes a "year of the Lord's Grace."

As members of St. Laurence Catholic Church we are blessed to be a part of a vibrant, enthusiastic, lively and growing faith community. We need only glance through the weekly bulletin to see the wealth of ministries, activities and events in which we have the opportunity to participate. Our personal and family lives, likewise, are filled with responsibilities, duties and activities. Oftentimes we are faced with so much that we find ourselves overwhelmed with things that in and of themselves are good; but when put into the context of everything else we are doing, make us feel anxious and exhausted.

This document was prepared by the Pastoral Council at the request of Fr. Drew to help all of us regain the balance and peace God desires for us. Through the Liturgical Seasons of the Catholic Church we have been given a template upon which we can gauge all of our activities. When we are faced with so many good things it is difficult to discern what we should say yes to and what we should either say no to or put off until another time. By learning more about what the Church desires for us during the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Ordinary Time; we will be better equipped to discern not only what we should be doing or not doing; but also the spiritual nature of our activities.

Advent

*Come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel*

What is the Advent Season?

The Advent season is the beginning of the liturgical year. It is a season of expectation and anticipation, preparation and contemplation. We long for the coming of the Messiah, the Prince of Peace. It is four weeks of preparing our hearts to receive Jesus our Savior who will bring incredible promise, healing, hope for peace on earth, and joy to the world.

Our Lord first comes to us in human flesh and weakness, wrapped in swaddling clothes, as our redeemer. At the second coming, Christ who came in the flesh comes again; only this time in glory and majesty, to establish a divine kingdom. Between these two visible comings, there is a more hidden coming; that is the coming of Christ that takes place when we invite him to dwell in our hearts, to take hold of our beings as our Lord and Master.

Advent is marked by waiting for all three comings of Christ, as it is a reminder that we should always strive to live in a state of anticipation and readiness. Most particularly, however, we are awed by the mystery of God taking on flesh for the sake of humanity. The liturgical Advent color of violet is the same as that of Lent which indicates both a spirit of penitence and ties the birth of Jesus to his ultimate death and resurrection. How lovely that it is also the color of royalty; the color to welcome a King! Prominent feasts such as the Feast of the Immaculate Conception and the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe occur within Advent to heighten our awareness of the coming of our Lord.

At St. Laurence

We see the season as a time of silence, prayer and hope. Although parishioners may begin to feel the expectation and anticipation of Christmas, we start by pausing to contemplate what we hope for and what is to come; the birth of a King who leads us to salvation. Most of us are keenly aware of the pull of the material world; the events, parties, and shopping mania that take place during this time of the year and pull us outside of the true Advent spirit. The Church has given us a great gift in setting aside this time of quiet waiting. Our prayerful participation in the season deepens our faith and negates our need to participate in pre-Christmas craziness.

We encourage ministries to

- Gather in prayer in a spirit of eager but penitential waiting and to support activities that foster parish and family togetherness
- Act with a spirit of charity and generosity
- Participate joyfully in Advent feast days

We encourage our parishioners to

- Live joyfully and expectantly without being overtaken by the commercial nature of the season
- Focus on the domestic church through participating in rituals such as the Advent wreath, family prayer, and attending mass as a family
- Set aside time to pray, ponder and take great hope in the redemption that is promised by Jesus the Messiah coming as a newborn babe at Christmas

Christmas

*A Savior has been born unto you,
The Messiah and Lord*

What is the Christmas Season?

Christmas is the celebration of the Incarnation of Jesus; the Word made flesh. Our celebration of the Christmas season begins on the evening of December 24 with the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ and ends on The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. This extended liturgical season is the fulfillment of the preparation, anticipation and quiet longing we experience during Advent. The mood changes from one of stillness and hope, to one of joyful celebration filled with love and gratitude, wonder and awe, family and communal togetherness. The liturgical color for the season of Christmas is white, symbolizing purity and joy.

The Christmas season is filled with Solemnities and Feast days. During the Feast of the Holy Family we honor the family of Jesus and celebrate the Holy family as the model for all families. During the Solemnity of Mary we commemorate the divine motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Solemnity of the Epiphany celebrates the revelation of Christ to the world and the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord signifies the purification of the world through Christ himself. The numerous Feasts and Solemnities that occur during the Christmas season highlight the extended nature of the season and the sanctity of the domestic church.

The Christmas season is the time for us to allow all that we hoped and longed for throughout Advent to take hold of us. Our hearts are filled with the love of God by the completely vulnerable and precious infant Jesus. By welcoming and accepting the weakness and humanity of Jesus, we learn to accept and love our own human weaknesses and limitations. We long to share with one another every aspect of our humanity, our happiness and joy, as well as our loneliness and brokenness. We are reminded that the greatest gift we have to give is the love God has given to each of us.

At St. Laurence

We see the season as a time of great joy, happiness, togetherness and celebration. Emphasis is placed on Christmas as a “season” rather than as “a day.” By having honored the true spirit of Advent we are now ready to celebrate! It is a time for families to reconnect and spend time with one another. It is also a time to joyfully celebrate with our friends and neighbors. Because the Christmas season is a time to honor our humanity, we should forget neither our own brokenness nor that of others. We must be mindful that for some, the Christmas season may be a time of loneliness or sadness. We must be sensitive to the struggles of the human condition and willing to walk with others with compassion.

We encourage ministries to

- Celebrate with joy the birth of our Savior
- Support activities that foster the domestic church
- Reach out to those who may feel forgotten

We encourage parishioners to

- Come to understand Christmas as a season rather than as a single day
- Participate joyfully in the Solemnities and Feast Days of the season
- Give generously of ourselves to our families and those in need

Ordinary Time

*After I have been with you all this time,
You still do not know me?*

What is Ordinary Time?

Ordinary Time encompasses that part of the year that does not fall within the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent or Easter. The Catholic Church celebrates two periods of Ordinary Time. The first period, Ordinary Time I, begins after the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord and ends the Tuesday evening before Ash Wednesday. Ordinary Time II runs from the Monday after Pentecost until Evening Prayer is said the night before Advent begins. Ordinary Time gets its name from the word *ordinal*, meaning “numbered,” since the weeks of Ordinary Time are expressed numerically. Depending up on the year, there are either 33 or 34 weeks of Ordinary Time.

Ordinary time does not mean “plain,” and is not meant to imply that we somehow get a break from the practicing our faith. Ordinary Time celebrates the mystery of Christ in *all* its aspects. Many important liturgical celebrations occur during Ordinary Time including the Solemnity of the Holy Trinity, the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart, the Solemnity of the Assumption, the Solemnity of All Saints and the Solemnity of Christ the King. Ordinary Time invites us to contemplate the parts of Jesus’ life that were ordinary, much like our own lives, and inspires us to see the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the most ordinary events and everyday activities of our lives. When we are able to see God in the most mundane aspects of our lives we realize that nothing is in fact ordinary! The liturgical color for Ordinary Time is green; symbolizing hope and growth.

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We see Ordinary Time as an opportunity better understand the life of Christ. The deeper our understanding of the life of Christ is; the closer we are to Him. Jesus wants us to know Him; He is continually revealing Himself to us in ordinary events and everyday encounters with one another. He wants us to see Him as a helpless infant, a refugee, a carpenter’s son, a lost boy, a man tempted in everyway that we are tempted, who welcomed children, had friends, served others, wept, was lonely, and ultimately gave his life so that we may have life. As we invite Jesus into every aspect of our being, we live out the pattern given to us of dying and rising in our own daily lives. When we are beset with difficulties, we hear Christ say, *“Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. (Mt 11:28)* Allowing ourselves to be refreshed by Christ empowers us to reach out to others and to be Christ for them.

We encourage ministries to

- Evaluate priorities and examine if and how Christ is revealed through activities
- Flourish—Ordinary Time is the time for planting, growing and harvesting
- Bring Christ to others through evangelization

We encourage parishioners to

- Seek God and be aware of what God is trying to tell us in the everyday events of our lives
- Learn more about the life of Christ through personal study and prayer or by joining a Bible Study or prayer group
- Follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit
- Faithfully attend mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation

Lent

*Turn away from sin
And be faithful to the Gospel*

What is the Season of Lent?

Lent is a time of penance designed to prepare the faithful to share fully and enthusiastically in the joys of Easter with purity of heart. Lent lasts for 40 days beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending on Holy Saturday. This 40 day period is symbolic of the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert being tempted by Satan. During Lent we contemplate with awe and thanksgiving the Paschal mystery and the salvation God offers us through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The three traditional forms of penance are prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

For adults preparing for baptism at the Easter Vigil, Lent is a time of inner and outer scrutiny. All Catholics are called to pray for those experiencing the rites of scrutiny and to examine the obstacles in our own lives that keep us from living out our own Baptismal promises. *Do we reject Satan? And all his works? And his empty promises?* The mark of ashes upon our foreheads helps us acknowledge our mortality and constant need of the mercy of God. All our acts of penance should be done with the intention of spiritual development and the desire to more fully understand who we truly are in God. In the contemplative, prayerful, desolation and silence of Lent, the Holy Spirit leads us to face what we want to deny, and to humbly submit ourselves to the transformative power of the love and mercy of God. *Come now, let us set things right, says the Lord: Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; though they be crimson red, they may become white as wool. (Is 1:18)*

Because of the austerity of Lent, *Alleluia* is not said in prayer or sung in the liturgy. The *Gloria* is not sung at Mass during Lent except for the few feasts and solemnities which may occur then. The liturgical color of Lent is Violet.

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We see the season of Lent as a prayerful time of purification, self denial, and charity. It is a time to quiet all of the noise and busyness in our lives and allow the Holy Spirit to lead us where we may not always want to go. Perhaps our most daunting task during Lent is to admit to ourselves who we are and what we have become, stand naked before God, and allow Him to transform us with His unconditional love. We are called to fast in a manner pleasing to God by *releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed,...Sharing [our] bread with the hungry, sheltering the homeless; [and] clothing the naked. (Is 58:6-7)*

We encourage ministries to

- Reflect the demeanor of Lent and foster the practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving
- Give generously of all that we are and all that we have
- Enter into the spirit of Lent by choosing a new prayer practice or common penance

We encourage parishioners to

- Participate in the many forms of common prayer and formation offered by the Church such as the Parish Mission, Friday morning Rosary, Stations of the Cross, Adoration, and daily mass.
- Take the time to reflect deeply upon what in our lives needs changing and to ask for the grace of God to help us
- Enter into the redemptive suffering of Jesus by offering our own pain and distress to God

Easter

*If Christ has not been raised,
Then our preaching is in vain
And your faith is in vain*

What is the Easter Season?

The Easter season is the fulfillment of our Catholic faith and the foundation of our salvation. It is a time during which we celebrate Jesus' resurrection and ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Easter season lasts for 50 days beginning with the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday when those who have been prepared come into full communion with the Church through the sacraments of initiation. Easter Sunday is the greatest solemnity in the liturgical calendar. It is the day we proclaim the glorious resurrection of Jesus and His triumph over sin. On the Feast of the Ascension we celebrate the entry of Jesus' humanity into Divine glory in God's heavenly Kingdom. The Easter season concludes with the celebration of Pentecost when we commemorate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and the birth of the Church.

We transition from the penitential season of Lent to Easter during Holy Week. Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday when the Church celebrates Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem in the days before his Passion. The week culminates with the *Triduum*, the three holiest days of the year - Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter.

The Easter season is a time of newness, rebirth and renewal. After the austerity and barrenness of Lent, the Church literally and figuratively sings a new song as the *Gloria* and the *Alleluia* return to the liturgy. We shout with joy, "Christ is risen! This is the day the Lord has made!" The liturgical color for the Easter season is white, symbolizing purity and joy. Red is used on Pentecost Sunday, symbolizing the fire of the Holy Spirit.

At St. Laurence

We see the Easter season as a time of great joy and celebration! We honor the *Triduum* with extraordinary reverence, solemnity and beauty. We welcome new members into the Church and reach out to inactive Catholics and visitors. We proclaim the joy of the Lord's victory over sin and death and marvel in the new life He has given to us. Having been touched by so great a love, we allow ourselves to be transformed. Because we cannot contain the love of God that has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, we find ourselves "on fire for Christ" and long to reach out in stewardship and service.

We encourage ministries to

- Re-engage members
- Revalidate and confirm their mission and purpose
- Reach out to and recruit new members

We encourage parishioners to

- Attend the *Triduum* liturgies to the extent possible
- Reach out to and welcome new members of the Church
- Be mindful of and express the joy of Easter throughout the season
- Allow ourselves to be refreshed and renewed by God's love
- Invite the Holy Spirit to enliven our faith
- Ask ourselves where God might be calling us to reach out to others