

**Our Lady of Lourdes RCIA
Liturgical Year & Lectionary**

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.... He has sent me to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”

Lk 4:18-19

Beginning with the Easter Triduum as its source of light, the new age of the Resurrection fills the whole liturgical year with its brilliance. The year is transfigured by the liturgy. The economy of salvation is at work within the framework of time.

CCC 1168

Our Lady of Lourdes RCIA

Liturgical Year & Lectionary

Summary

The “Liturgical Year” is the annual cycle or calendar in which the Church relives the saving work of Jesus Christ’s life, death and resurrection. The major events of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection are arranged in historical sequence so that we might liturgically relive the meaning of those saving mysteries in a prayerful way. By means of devotional exercises, instruction, prayer, and works of penance and mercy, the Church, according to traditional practices, completes the formation of the faithful during the various times of the Liturgical Year.

In setting the events of Christ’s life within a liturgical calendar the Church offers Christ’s redeeming power to us in a sacramental way. What Jesus once accomplished in his ministry on earth is now re-presented to us throughout the liturgical year through the ministry of the Church.

The R.C.I.A. (RCIA)¹ draws catechumens and the whole Christian community through a journey of conversion celebrated in the feasts and seasons of the liturgical year. Catechumens are initiated into the Christian community through their liturgical experience of resurrection and new life at the Easter Vigil.

In the early Church, Catechumen was the name applied to one who had not yet been initiated into the sacred mysteries, but was undergoing a course of preparation for that purpose. It is currently applied to someone who is receiving suitable pastoral formation and guidance aimed at preparing them to participate fully in the Christian life. They receive the Sacraments of Initiation - Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist - at the Easter Vigil.

In the liturgical year the various aspects of the one Paschal mystery of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection unfold over the course of the calendar year. This is also the case with the cycle of feasts surrounding the mystery of the Incarnation (Annunciation, Christmas, Epiphany) that make present for us the beginning of our redemption.²

Easter And Advent

1. The liturgical year is divided into two major seasons: Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter/Pentecost. The liturgical moment of Ordinary Time occurs between them. Each major season has a time of preparation and celebration, a time of conversion and rejoicing.
2. Each year, the central event of the liturgical year is the Easter Triduum – the three days of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter. “Beginning with the Easter Triduum as its source of light, the resurrection of Christ fills the whole liturgical year with its brilliance. Gradually, on either side of the Easter Triduum, the entire year is transfigured by the liturgy.”³

¹ Rite of Christian Initiation Of Adults

² CCC 1171

³ CCC 1168

Our Lady of Lourdes RCIA

Liturgical Year & Lectionary

3. The Easter season begins on Ash Wednesday with Lent as a time of spiritual renewal, fasting, and almsgiving. For catechumens Lent is a time of spiritual preparation in anticipation of the sacraments of initiation. The Easter Triduum of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil lead us through the events of our salvation in the Passion, death and resurrection of the Lord.

“Easter is not simply one feast among others, but the “Feast of feasts,” the “Solemnities of solemnities,” just as the Eucharist is the “Sacrament of sacraments.” Saint Athanasius calls Easter “the Great Sunday” 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.”⁴
4. The Christmas season begins with Advent as a time of spiritual preparation and anticipation for the Messiah’s coming. The feast of Christmas celebrates the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ followed by four other feasts: the Feast of the Holy Family, the Feast of Mary, Mother of God, Epiphany, and the Feast of Jesus’ Baptism.
5. The changing focus of each liturgical season is visible in the vestments and decorations used in churches. Liturgical colors vary from the Advent tones of purple to vibrant colors of red, gold or white in accord with the tone of the feast being celebrated. In Ordinary Time the color green is used to reflect the liturgical season.

Solemnities, Feasts, and Memorials

6. Other cycles in the Church’s year include special feast days and Holy days to honor the mystery of Christ and Mary the Mother of God, as well as the cycle of saints and martyrs.
7. “Holy days of obligation” in the liturgical year are feast days when Catholics must attend mass. All Sundays are sanctified as holy days of obligation. The holy days of obligation currently celebrated in the United States are: Christmas, Solemnity of Mary (celebrated on New Year’s Day), Ascension Thursday, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Assumption of Mary into Heaven, and All Saints Day.
8. The celebration of the days of Saints who have universal significance is required throughout the entire Church.⁵ Celebration of the days of other Saints is optional, and left up to the veneration of particular churches, religious communities, or countries.
9. The different types of celebrations are distinguished from each other by their importance and are accordingly called Solemnities, Feasts or Memorials.
 - ❖ **Solemnities** are days of greatest importance and begin on the evening of the preceding day. Some Solemnities have their own Vigil Mass; e.g. the Mass on Christmas Eve which has different readings so as to connote a chronology

⁴ CCC 1169

⁵ Eph. 6:18

Our Lady of Lourdes RCIA

Liturgical Year & Lectionary

of the event and/or a special lesson. Christmas has three distinct masses with separate readings – on Christmas Eve, at Dawn, and during the day.

- ❖ **Feasts** are normally celebrated within the normal Liturgical Day (midnight to midnight).
- ❖ **Memorials** are either Obligatory or Optional. Their observance is combined with the celebration of the weekday.

Sunday Mass

10. The Church celebrates the memorial of Christ's Resurrection, Sunday, as the Lord's Day.⁶ This follows a tradition handed down from the Apostles, which took its origin from the day on which Jesus Christ rose from the dead.⁷ It symbolizes the new creation begun in the power of Christ's resurrection.⁸
11. Sunday Mass or the Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day is at the heart of the Church's liturgical life because it is the day when Christ's Paschal Mystery is celebrated by the faithful.⁹ It is the foremost holy day of obligation in the Church.¹⁰
12. Because of its special importance, the celebration of Sunday is replaced only by Solemnities or by Feasts of the Lord. The Sundays of Advent, Lent and Easter Time, however, take precedence over all Solemnities and Feasts of the Lord. Solemnities that occur on these Sundays are observed on the following Monday.

Weekdays

13. Each day is made holy through liturgical celebrations of God's people, especially the Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Divine Office. The liturgical day runs from midnight to midnight, but the observance of Sunday and of Solemnities begins with the evening of the preceding day. Weekdays are celebrated in various ways according to the importance attached to each one.
 - ❖ **Ash Wednesday** and the days of Holy Week, from Monday to Thursday inclusive, are of greater liturgical importance than all other weekday celebrations.
 - ❖ **The weekdays of Advent** from December 17th to December 24th inclusive and all the weekdays of Lent take precedence over Obligatory Memorials.
 - ❖ **Solemnities and Feasts** take precedence over all other weekdays and Memorials.

⁶ Deut. 5:12-15

⁷ Ps. 118:24

⁸ CCC 2174

⁹ Ex 31:15

¹⁰ CCC 2174 – 2188

Our Lady of Lourdes RCIA

Liturgical Year & Lectionary

Liturgical Times

14. Liturgical Times are comprised of Advent, Christmas Time, The Easter Triduum, Easter Time and Ordinary Time.

- ❖ **Advent** begins with the fourth Sunday before Christmas and ends on the Sunday before Christmas.
- ❖ **Christmas Time** runs from Christmas until Sunday after Epiphany.
- ❖ **Lent** lasts from Ash Wednesday to the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday.
- ❖ **The Easter Triduum** begins with the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, reaches its high point in the Easter Vigil, and closes on Easter Sunday.
- ❖ **Easter Time** is comprised of the fifty days from Easter Sunday to Pentecost and is celebrated as one feast day.
- ❖ **Ordinary Time** is comprised of the thirty-three or thirty four weeks during the liturgical year where no particular aspect of the mystery of Christ is celebrated.

The Lectionary

15. The Lectionary is a book containing portions of the Bible that are read on particular days of the year. It contains the cycle of selections of readings from the Bible for Sundays, major feasts and daily readings. The Church follows a three year Sunday lectionary cycles (A, B and C) and a two year daily cycle (years 1 and 2). Catholics hear extended segments of the Bible during liturgical worship but do not get a complete reading of all of the Scriptures from the readings in the Lectionary.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How has your appreciation of the Church's liturgical year grown during the RCIA?
- What is the importance of Sunday, as the Sabbath or Lord's Day?
- How might the lectionary readings assist in your daily or weekly study of the Bible?