

# The Liturgical Seasons of the Catholic Church

## ORDINARY TIME Living Our Faith



*"The Lord is close to all who call on Him,  
Yes,  
To all who call on Him in Truth."  
Psalm 145:18*

### Why is There No Ordinary Time in the Traditional Calendar?

Ordinary Time is a feature of the current (post-Vatican II) liturgical calendar. In the traditional Catholic calendar used before 1970 and still used in the celebration of the Traditional Latin Mass, as well as in the calendars of the Eastern Catholic Churches, the Sundays of Ordinary Time are referred to as the Sundays After Epiphany and the Sundays After Pentecost.

In Latin, the name of this time is *tempus per annum* translated as time during the year.

Due to the fact that the term ordinary in English most often means something that's not special or distinctive, many people think that Ordinary Time refers to parts of the calendar of the Catholic Church, as well as some other churches of Western Christianity, that are unimportant. Even though the season of Ordinary Time makes up most of the liturgical year in the Catholic Church, the fact that Ordinary Time refers to those periods that fall outside of the major liturgical seasons reinforces this impression. Yet Ordinary Time is far from unimportant or uninteresting.

### So Why Is Ordinary Time Called Ordinary?

Ordinary Time is called "ordinary" not because it is common but simply because the weeks of Ordinary Time are numbered. The Latin word *ordinalis*, which refers to numbers in a series, stems from the Latin word *ordo*, from which we get the English word *order*. Thus, the numbered weeks of Ordinary Time, in fact, represent the ordered life of the Church—the period in which we live our lives neither in feasting (as in the Christmas and Easter Seasons) or in more severe penance (as in Advent and Lent), but in watchfulness and expectation of the Second Coming of Christ.

It's appropriate, therefore, that the Gospel for the Second Sunday of Ordinary Time (which is actually the first Sunday celebrated in Ordinary Time) always features either John the Baptist's acknowledgment of Christ as the Lamb of God or Christ's first miracle—the transformation of water into wine at the wedding at Cana.

Thus for Catholics, Ordinary Time is the part of the year in which Christ, the Lamb of God, walks among us and transforms our lives. There's nothing "ordinary" about that!

*"Behold the Lamb of God  
who takes away the sins of the world ..."*



## When is Ordinary Time?

Ordinary Time refers to all of those parts of the Catholic Church's liturgical year that aren't included in the major seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter. Ordinary Time thus encompasses and comprises of two different periods in the Church's calendar, since the Christmas Season immediately follows Advent (when the Church Year begins) and the Easter Season immediately follows Lent: In some traditions, the first period is celebrated as Epiphanytide, and the latter of these periods is observed as Trinitytide.

The Church year begins with Advent, followed immediately by the Christmas Season. So the first period of Ordinary Time begins on the day after the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord - the end of the liturgical season of Christmas. The Church normally celebrates this feast on the Sunday after the Epiphany (6th January - the first Sunday of the Year.) The Christmas Season includes the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, so Ordinary Time begins the next day, not on the Sunday. However, the Sunday after the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is always counted as the "Second Sunday of Ordinary Time". It ends on Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday, which of course marks the beginning of the liturgical Season of Lent. This falls between 4th February and 10th March (inclusive), and so the period of Ordinary Time between Christmas and Lent may end amid the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, or ninth week of Ordinary Time because Ash Wednesday is a moveable feast which occurs on the 40th day (excluding Sundays) before the Resurrection of the Lord (Easter Sunday) which itself is a moveable feast.

Both Lent and the Easter Season fall outside of Ordinary Time, therefore the second period of Ordinary Time begins on the Monday after Pentecost Sunday, the conclusion of the Easter Season, which is the Sunday between 10th May and 13th June that marks the 50th day of Easter. Then Ordinary Time continues and concludes on the Saturday afternoon before the first Sunday of Advent (27th November to 3rd December) when the liturgical year begins again.

Ordinary Time thus always includes the entire months of July, August, September and October and most or all of June and November. In some years, Ordinary Time includes a portion of May, or a day or two in early December, or both.

## How Many Sundays Are There in Ordinary Time?

In any given year, there are either 33 or 34 Sundays in Ordinary Time. Because Easter is a moveable feast, and thus the Lent and Easter seasons "float" from year to year, the number of Sundays in each period of Ordinary Time vary from the other period as well as from year to year.

Sundays in these seasons are numbered as the nth Sunday after Epiphany or Pentecost, as appropriate, and weekdays are identified in reference to the Sunday they follow. Both of these periods of time, combined, are the longest time in the liturgical year. Several Sundays bear the name of feasts or solemnities celebrated on those days, including Trinity Sunday and the Feast of Christ the King. The actual number of complete or partial weeks of Ordinary Time in any given year can total 33 or 34. In most years, Ordinary Time comprises only 33 weeks, so then the Church omits one week that otherwise would precede the resumption of Ordinary Time following Pentecost Sunday. For example, in 2011, the Sunday before Ash Wednesday was the Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time, but the day after Pentecost Sunday began the 11th Week in Ordinary Time.

## Why Is There No First Sunday in Ordinary Time?

In most years, the Sunday after January 6th is the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. In countries such as the United States, however, where the celebration of Epiphany is transferred to Sunday if that Sunday is January 7th or 8th, Epiphany is celebrated instead. As feasts of our Lord, both the Baptism of the Lord and Epiphany displace a Sunday in Ordinary Time. Thus the first Sunday in the period of Ordinary Time is the Sunday that falls after the first week of Ordinary Time, which makes it the Second Sunday of Ordinary Time.



## Solemnities and Feasts in Ordinary Time



In addition, certain solemnities and feasts that fall on Sundays during Ordinary Time preempt the observance of an ordinarily numbered Sunday. On preempted Sundays, the liturgical colour of the feast or solemnity replaces the liturgical colour green. These feast days include, in the Roman Catholic calendar, any holy day of obligation, any other solemnity, any feast of the Lord, and the Commemoration of All Faithful Departed Souls.

On the Universal Calendar, these include:

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord on 2nd February (liturgical colour: white),  
Solemnity of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist on 24th June (liturgical colour: white),  
Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul on 29th June (liturgical colour: red)  
Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord on 6th August (liturgical colour: white)  
Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on 14th September (liturgical colour: red)  
Solemnity of All Saints on 1st November (liturgical colour: white)  
Commemoration of All Faithful Departed Souls on 2nd November (liturgical colour: violet or black), and  
Feast of the Dedication of the Basilica of Saint John Lateran in Rome on 9th November (liturgical colour: white).

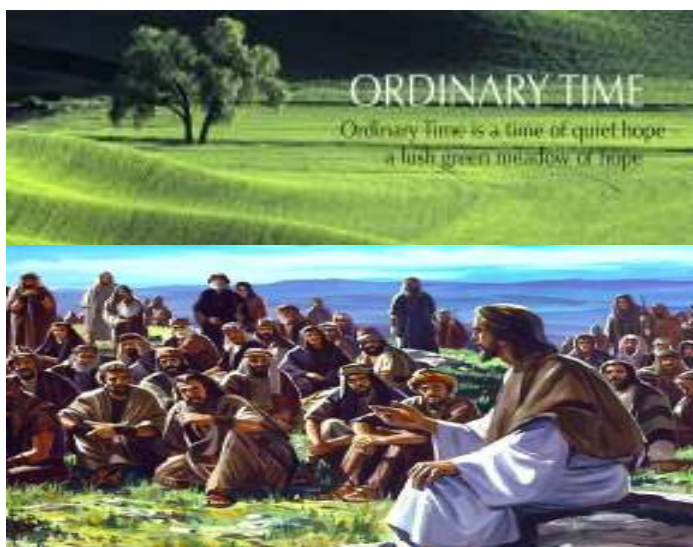
The following observances always preempt a Sunday in Ordinary Time:

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord or Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord always preempts the First Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Solemnity of Pentecost always begins the first week of Ordinary Time after Eastertide  
Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity always preempts the Sunday immediately after Pentecost  
Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King of the Universe always preempts the 34th (and final) Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Other solemnities which outrank Sundays of Ordinary Time vary from parish to parish and diocese to diocese; they may include the feast of the patron saint of a parish and the feast of the dedication of the parish church.

In addition, if a solemnity or feast that outranks a Sunday of Ordinary Time, such as those mentioned above, should occur during the week, a priest celebrating Mass with a congregation may observe the solemnity on a nearby Sunday. Such a celebration is traditionally called an "external solemnity," even if the feast in question is not ranked as a solemnity. If an external solemnity is celebrated on a Sunday, the colour of that celebration is used rather than green.

## Why Is Green the Colour of Ordinary Time?

The liturgical colour normally assigned to Ordinary Time is green—for those days when there is no special feast. Green vestments and altar cloths have traditionally been associated with the time after Pentecost, the period in which the Church founded by the risen Christ and enlivened by the Holy Spirit began to grow and to spread the Gospel to all nations.



A time for...  
Learning  
Growing  
Exploring the Christian Story  
Remembering the Church's Mission  
Living the Word of God

