

'He shook his raiment and said unto them, "Your blood be upon your own heads: I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles"' Being then true heirs of the ancients and living like them, as we are, in troubled times, with them we can confidently repeat: 'Behold he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep: the Lord is thy keeper.' God cannot change his mind.



## THE LITURGICAL YEAR

F. A. MCGOWAN

IT seems reasonable enough to have a Church calendar. It seems obvious that the chief events of our Lord's life should be arranged round several pivotal feasts and the whole neatly distributed throughout the year. All healthy lives have a rhythm in harmony with the seasons of the year. We plant, cultivate, harvest, let the soil pause in a rest, then begin over again. We mark off anniversary dates of births, deaths, victories, catastrophes. Some are family affairs, but those of national importance are celebrated with a regularity and a protocol which is a test of our patriotism—lest we ourselves forget or lest we fail to pass on the torch to the next generation.

But the Church Year is called the Liturgical Year because it is more than a commemoration cycle. It is one of the four inter-related parts of the liturgy, one of the channels through which the Church communicates to us not the history of the Mysteries of Christ but their very essence. As one great liturgical writer has said very clearly:

... every single event in the life of Christ on earth belongs not only to him personally, but to all men. Because Jesus is God and his actions are therefore divine, we speak of the events of his blessed life as *mysteries*. By this word we mean to indicate the difference between the events or actions of his life and those in the lives of ordinary men. For every word and deed of Christ is alive with divinity. And because he is the Head of mankind, the 'first born of many brethren' (Rom. 8, 29), the

mysteries of Christ belong to all those who through Baptism have been made members of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, the Church Year differs infinitely from any other calendar organization because it is no figure of speech but a fact that we re-live, with him, the life of Christ. The mysteries are made actual through the Mass. They recur year after year and we grow in Christ by the increase in life that we receive at each celebration. So, by definition, the liturgical year is our gradual growth in Christ through participation in the recurrent actualization of his mysteries.

The question immediately arises: why the recurrent re-presentation?, why year in and year out, with very little change except by the introduction of the new saints in their cycle? The answer is that we may *learn, understand, use* the events of our Lord's life. Repetition is the basis of good teaching. In the Old Testament, when God ruled his people more directly, he set up annual celebrations: Passover, Pentecost, the Tabernacles, the Dedication of the Temple, etc. And every adult Jew was expected to exert himself and make the journey to Jerusalem to participate in these feasts. We need no psychology text to know how short is man's attention span and how much we need reminders of the greatest human factors influencing our lives. But there is a deeper basis of need when we are dealing with divine life. God has not limited us to one chance where we must take all of him we can hold. Our Lord knows our ever-growing need for him and he is always ready to meet it. Our Lord knows from experience how gradual is our physical and mental growth. We recall the words of St Luke (2, 52): And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age, and grace with God and men. He could not grow in divine wisdom but he could always increase in experimental knowledge. One of the basic thoughts of devotion to the Sacred Heart, which is devotion to the divine-human love of our Lord for his Father and for us, is the realization that until God became man, he could not know *by experience* our human emotions. So he awaits us with eagerness and understanding as we come each year with the new accumulation of experimental knowledge to contact the mystery and draw from it what we could not have done the previous year. This Easter, the mere fact that we have lived twelve months more

<sup>1</sup> Sister Jane Maric, O.P., *Living in Christ*. (Ann Arbor, Michigan, Edwards Brothers, 1943, p.58.)

and have known people who have been born or died, physically and spiritually, makes us better able to understand and to use the Risen Life.

Like all acts of religion (the word means re-linking), the Liturgical Year has a two-fold purpose which it accomplishes; however, in its distinctive way. The two-fold purpose of every act of religion is to glory God (honour him) by sanctifying and hallowing ourselves. The particular way which the Liturgical Year offers for us to glorify God is re-presenting the events of our Lord's life and making possible our association with Christ in the historical acts which glorified the Father. The particular way which the Liturgical Year gives us to sanctify ourselves is by making possible our reception *now* of the graces which Christ merited for us at the moment of his historical life.

The Liturgical Year, as we said before, is infinitely more than a commemoration cycle, because it is centred on the Sacrifice of the Mass which re-presents each time *all* the mysteries of Christ. The proper of the Mass, as will be seen by reference to some special Masses, highlights one or two of these mysteries by the choice of the gospel. In the Requiem Mass, those who have died are associated through and with him who died for them and us. The offerings which represent us all, but them in a particular way, become, at the Consecration, our Lord's *living* Body and Blood. He who says that he is their Resurrection and Life is present in the sacramental mode but in the glorified state, for he can die no more.

We remind ourselves that the liturgy never stops short at a completed ceremonial act. The divine-human energy it communicates is to be expended and developed in Christian living: 'Put ye on the mind of Christ'—a full-time job and a life-long one. The Liturgical Year centred upon the Holy Sacrifice influences and sets the mental tone of the other hours of our day. It gives unity (systematic variety) to our lives. It gives this more obviously at Christmastide, Lent, and Easter, but, with a little cultivation, we can include other phases of the Church Year. Many families have the habit of Saturday evening preparation of the next day's Mass. It can be well done in ten or fifteen minutes (by one's self in five). Frequently, where this has begun with a mother and one child, it has drawn in everyone who can read. Three or four minutes of silent reading of the Proper. Then the

father or mother poses a set of four or six questions—something like these. What is the special tone tomorrow (keynote)? The smart ones will soon get it from the Introit. What do we ask for specially tomorrow? where? (The Prayers.) How does our Lord show himself? (Gospel.) What resolutions does he inspire? Other methods of studying the Mass will be suggested.

After Mass we can choose a phrase or sentence from the Proper and make it into a chanty or ditty as we go about our work. In Advent, 'The Lord is nigh' or 'Prepare ye the way' makes a good accompaniment for sweeping, walking, scrubbing, dusting, or even watching the mixer whirl. During Lent, we can select something for every mood; some like to repeat the words of the Good Friday hymn, 'From the tree Christ has reigned'. One can do some vigorous thumping to the rhythm of 'The Lord is risen, as He said'. We are all childlike enough to want periods of anticipation, a build-up towards a celebration, then the big event followed by retrospective enjoyment of souvenirs and the discussion of details. There are various sacramental ways, all of them inexpensive, by which we can prepare for Easter and Christmas and at the same time counteract the too evident commercialization. It is Halifax's honour to have initiated the movement to bring Christ back into Christmas. There is the practice of the Advent wreath which intensifies the longing for Christmas as spaces of the four weeks are filled in. In one western Archdiocese of the United States, each family was asked to express concretely the fact of Christ's birthday by serving at supper on Christmas Eve a cake with white icing and a single candle. This cake was to be announced in the home beforehand, referred to constantly during the last week of Advent. If possible, every able-bodied person should assist in the mixing, some way or another. Non-Catholics were so impressed at the children's chatter that many did the same for their families. Most of us have hot cross buns on Good Friday and we could arrange to have on Maundy Thursday a Passover dinner of roast lamb, lettuce, a vegetable that corresponds to lentils, and wine jelly dessert. Two book suggestions may seem to touch two extremes: Mrs Berger's cookbook, subtitle, *The Liturgical Year in the Kitchen*,<sup>2</sup> and Father Parsch's

<sup>2</sup> Florence Sudhoff Berger, *Cooking for Christ: Liturgical Year in the Kitchen*. Des Moines 12, Iowa: National Catholic Rural Life Conference, 1949. 127 pp.; illus. \$2.50.

guide to the study of the Lenten Masses.<sup>3</sup> . . . from the Mass we carry the mystery into the home and workshop. As we see, the Liturgical Year integrates all the phases of our daily lives.

Pope Pius X said:

The primary and indispensable source of the true Christian spirit is the active participation of the faithful in the most holy mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church. (*Motu Proprio*, 1903.)

And Pius XI, instituting the Feast of Christ the King:

For imbuing the people with faith and leading them by faith to the interior joys of life, the annual celebrations of the sacred mysteries are far more efficacious than even the most weighty documents of ecclesiastical teaching . . . (these celebrations) appeal to mind and heart, that is, to the whole man.

The Liturgical Year offers the most regular method of divine direction, especially in adult life. Through the liturgy of the Sunday Mass we all come in contact with Christian instruction. It is astounding how much dogma is expressed concretely in the Proper. This fact furnishes another way of preparing the next day's Mass. As for each part: which truths of faith? which lessons of Christian morality? which suggestions for prayer?

The Liturgical Year meets the needs of our personal development by recurrent re-presentation. It integrates truths on a new level of intellectual growth. Those who have been asked to help certain Catholics, morally good but intellectually bored, find the usual remedy is introduction to the Missal and a start in living the Liturgical Year. Too often these adults have been trying to carry on with the prayers to the Baby Jesus learned at the time of their First Communion. Active participation in the Liturgy by dialogue Mass has opened up ways of union with our Lord which will never lack freshness nor promise of excitement because there are the changes in the Proper and because each year one comes with greater capacity to the feast. The Liturgical Year arouses emotions and dispositions befitting our maturing responses to the beauty of Christ—and by beauty is meant the splendour of truth, the shining forth of his justice tempered by mercy, the flashing of his moral indignation restrained by his patience.

The Liturgical Cycle, each year deepening and widening our

<sup>3</sup> Pius Parsch, *The Church's Year of Grace*, V.2. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1953—5 v.; \$3.00 each volume.

knowledge of an event in our Lord's historical life, evokes more purposeful and more willed desires to correspond in conduct with the mysteries actualized. It inspires more sincere petitions for divine help because we recognize the need of supernatural means to accomplish supernatural acts. And the greatest difference between any other commemorative cycle and the life of our Lord as far as our living is concerned is that the Liturgical Year bestows the graces proper to the mystery. The structure of the Liturgical Year can be considered first, then the Proper as the means by which the Liturgical Year draws from the Holy Sacrifice as from its source.

There are two cycles but the frame of the structure is the Cycle of Redeeming Mysteries, pivoted about Easter, and for the most part movable in date to accord with the shift in the Paschal moon. This cycle is also called the Temporal Cycle, or the Proper of the Time. Interlocking with it is the so-called Sanctoral Cycle or the Proper of the Saints in which the feasts are celebrated on definite calendar dates. The latter includes some feasts of our Lord—the Precious Blood and the Transfiguration; all of our Lady's except the Lenten feast of her Dolours; and all feasts of the saints. Besides these two cycles there are the seasonal Ember Days: Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays: 'post Lent, post Pent, post Crux, post Lux'—after the First Sunday of Lent, Pentecost Sunday, Feast of the Holy Cross (September 14th), and Feast of St Lucy (December 13th).

In the early centuries of our Christian era, the Church year began with Septuagesima. Christmas was celebrated in various places on different dates—in March, June, September and December. To check the abuses surviving from two pagan feasts, that of the birth of the sun during the week of the twenty-first of December, and that of the legal New Year on January first, it was decided to Christianize both. The 25th was chosen for the Birthday of the Sun of Justice which made its eighth day, New Year's, the Feast of the Circumcision. At the time that the Church came out of the catacombs, Advent was an eight-day period. Gradually it lengthened so that by the tenth century it was six weeks in many places, five weeks in others. In the Roman liturgy the similarity of the last Sunday after Pentecost to the First Sunday of Advent is a reminder of the former five-week practice. Now, Advent must consist of four Sundays; the last may coincide with

Christmas Eve. The *Gloria*, formerly only sung on Christmas Day, is not sung, and other signs of joy are hidden so as to achieve a great climax on Christmas Day. We consider the promises of a redeemer and live with Elias, John the Baptist, and our Lady in expectation of his arrival. At Christmas, as his birth is actualized in the Holy Sacrifice, we celebrate his coming under five aspects: There is reminder of his natural sonship, the only-begotten of the Father from all eternity; there is commemoration of his birth of the Blessed Virgin at Bethlehem in time; there is his rebirth each year in our souls by grace; there is foresight of two great comings—the individual summons at the end of life when we go forth to meet him, and Judgment Day when he will return in awful Majesty.

At the Epiphany, he is shown to representatives of the Gentile world; that is where most of us come in, and our gifts are mentioned in one of the three poetical prayers of the Roman liturgy, the Secret from the Mass of the Epiphany:

Graciously look down, we beseech Thee, O Lord, upon the gifts of thy Church: by which gold, frankincense, and myrrh are no longer laid before Thee; but He is sacrificed and received who by those very gifts was signified, Jesus Christ Thy Son Our Lord.

Easter is the greatest day of the Church Year, not Good Friday. Our Lord came not just to die for us but to restore life. We celebrate the Pasch now at the same time as the Jews do. By the time of our Lord, it was established that the Pasch was to be in the week after the first full moon after the spring equinox, for the very practical reason that this enabled pilgrim bands to travel by the Paschal moon, the better to escape attacks of brigands who hung along the routes to Jerusalem. But it was the great spring festival, the feast of new life; and now the Christian is invited to spend a good two months preparing for it.

The three Sundays of the Septuagesima season form a transition period from the high gaiety of Epiphany to the sober days of Lent. Lent, in strict terminology, ends when Passiontide begins, but the term is used somewhat generally to cover the period from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday. Formerly, the Lenten fast, which was very severe, began only on the day after *Laetare* Sunday, which explains that day's unexpected festive tone; it was the last fling. Now it is *mi-Carême*. During Lent we live an intensi-

fied life with our Redeemer. During Passiontide, the church decorations are covered, even the crosses because they were often richly set with jewels, and the symbols of mourning are introduced. During Holy Week, we try to live day by day the events of our Lord's last days before his death. From his side, when the Sacred Heart was pierced, the Church was born.

During Eastertide we celebrate the resurrection of the Redeemer, his apparitions as he consoled his followers (and his deserters) and as he established the Church. The transitional feast of the Ascension is the glorification of the Redeemer's Humanity. And on that day Limbo was emptied; our Lord took with him the souls of the saved, and transferred them to heaven.

On the Jewish feast of Pentecost commemorating the fiftieth day after the great Sabbath, the occasion when Moses received the Commandments, the Holy Ghost descended upon the apostles. English-speaking Jews call it Confirmation Day and it is the occasion when those boys who are over eleven and who are declared sufficiently instructed by the rabbi, through the ceremony of the Bar Mitzvah, enter the estate of spiritual adulthood. It may have been on the occasion of this feast that our Lord was lost and found in his Father's house.

Then comes a summary trilogy of feasts: we celebrate the Source and Goal of the redeemed on Trinity Sunday; the memorial of redemption, the Holy Eucharist, on Corpus Christi; the motive-force of Redemption, the divine-human love of our Lord for his Father and for us, on the Feast of the Sacred Heart.

The Sundays after Pentecost show the fruits of Redemption, the growth of the Mystical Body. For the first seventeen, the focus is on its spread and development here on earth. Then comes a break, another transition trilogy, this time of the Mystical Body. On the last Sunday of October, that is, the one nearest to the first of November, the Church on earth proclaims Christ the King. On November the first, the whole Church Triumphant in heaven is honoured, and, on the next day, according to the Roman martyrology:

The commemoration of all the faithful departed; whereon Holy Church, their common Mother, after being careful with fitting praise to celebrate all those her children who now rejoice in heaven, striveth also to help all those who still groan in Purgatory by her suffrages, which are of avail before Christ her Lord



and Spouse; that as speedily as may be, they may attain to join the society of the citizens on high.

The proper of the last Sundays after Pentecost focus on our Lord's Second Coming until we are back again at Advent.



## THE LATTER YEARS

MARY ANGELA LOFTING

**T**HE latter years of a Catholic who has held the faith from birth, and practised it consistently on an ordinary working level, represent a period when much that supported the soul falls away, when former spiritual helps are shed and life is left with only the necessities for carrying on. As on the natural physical level these years are a stern test of the individual, of his traditions, good sense, the breadth of view experience has brought him, so the soul taking stock of its spiritual resources looks back to the things that have remained and receives its last challenge of final perseverance. Thus the sum total of what life has taught on both levels lies open now in behaviour and reaction to circumstance.

The parable of the workers in the vineyard, the same penny for the man who had worked in the heat of the whole day, sets something of a seal on these latter years in the discipline of its measure and right understanding. That we were given these last years bespeaks their necessity for our co-operation moving with the times. Now or never is complete integration of body and soul essential for fruitful endeavour.

It has been possible in earlier years to carry on a spiritual approach to living whilst still maintaining considerable division between body and soul, for even under circumstances of some hardship and difficulty we are upheld by our natural imagination. The future is still our own as far as we can see and full of possibilities; the wildest hopes might still be realized, given half a chance, despite the day-to-day hum-drum realities. Does not nature herself thus lure on all humanity?—and we should not be her normal children if anything less than time taught us the whole truth.