

— Keeping Time with God —



*The Jewish Feasts Are Fulfilled
in the Sacred Liturgical Year*

The Easter Vigil when I was received into full communion with the Church was wondrous for me. I was in my thirties, and I remember thinking that I had never before properly celebrated this glorious season.

I had spent that entire Lent in quiet. I gave up coffee. I meditated on the sorrowful mysteries of the Rosary every day. I watched *The Passion of the Christ*. I did the Stations of the Cross. I attended every Liturgy of Holy Week.

I couldn't wait to receive my first Eucharist and become one in communion with all my new brothers and sisters. But I loved the agony of waiting, too, because I remembered my vehement prayer from many years ago, the prayer he was about to answer in a way I could have never anticipated: "Lord, I just want to be *closer* to you! Isn't there some way we can be closer?" Waiting made me long to be one with Jesus all the more.

At the Easter Vigil, I bawled like a baby through the entire Liturgy. The next morning, Easter Sunday, I went to Mass even though I had participated in the Vigil, just so I could celebrate Jesus' resurrection again, hear it proclaimed again, sing about it again, and say again, "He is risen *indeed!*" I was so excited that the Easter Season would last for *fifty days* until Pentecost!

I had lived through three decades of Easters without such an intensity of participation. Before being received into the Catholic Church, I do not think I had ever experienced what Easter was *really* all about. Although not with the same zeal as that first year, I still love getting into the "Lenten zone" each year. What makes all the difference for me? It is the Church's liturgical calendar. Whose great idea was the liturgical year? It was God's!

PROFESSING TIME'S SACREDNESS

God knows what we need. We need rest! It is written in natural law and preserved in the Ten Commandments that we give time to God. Rest is both spiritual and physical, so ignoring our inherent need for worship combined with rest is detrimental to our physical, emotional, and spiritual health. In addition to a physical structure, proper worship was meant to include an annual worship schedule, solemn ceremonies, and vivid rituals.

As a non-Catholic, the word “liturgy” was foreign to me, but I learned that it comes from the Greek word *leitourgia*, meaning “a work of the people.” In its broadest sense, “liturgy” simply means “a ritual for public worship.” It is important to note, though, that liturgy in the Old Testament denoted God’s presence. Liturgy, then, is not about style or preference, but *presence*. Liturgy is God’s way of sanctifying space and time. God gives us worship liturgy, so it is not according to self-expression, individual desire, or arbitrary wishes; we do not presume to invent or eliminate sacred liturgy for ourselves. Instead, liturgy is prayer most fully in God’s presence, an attitude of orientation toward God, of listening, sensing, and receiving God as “holy other” in wonder and adoration.

SACRED MOADIM

Proper worship was centered around God’s presence in the Tabernacle in a set liturgical schedule of hours, days, weeks, months, and years—known as *moadim* (“seasons”)—that kept the people’s minds and hearts looking upward to God in covenant and anticipating his covenant action in their everyday lives. In his *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas Aquinas relates that time is an imperfection because it measures change, and God is unchangeable.⁵ Sometimes it is said

that time is God's way of stopping everything from happening at once. By ordaining their observance of this sacred schedule of holy, festive days centered around the Tabernacle, God was teaching his people that space and time were created for worship. Time is sacred, so it is not *mine* at all, but a gift in which I experience God as present. God called these festive days *his* "appointed feasts" (Leviticus 23:2).

Additionally, the seven major *moadim* were themselves based on sevens, which, as we see with the Sabbath, is the number associated with covenant and therefore also symbolic of completeness and divinity. The *moadim* were celebrated in two different periods corresponding to the two agricultural seasons. In Israel, there was a time of rain in the spring called the "former" or "early" rain and a time of rain in the fall called the "latter" rain. This division was related to the two appearances the Messiah was prophesied to make on the earth: "He will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth" (Hosea 6:3).

Continuing the pattern in sevens, the seventh day was the Sabbath; seven Sabbaths were the week of Passover; seven weeks of seven Sabbaths were the Feast of Pentecost; the seventh month celebrated the Feasts of Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles; the seventh year and the seventh seven of years were years of Jubilee. God uses time to "seven himself" in covenant to his people and creation. The Israelites' observance of the *moadim* united them to him in covenant time.

Unlike pagan religions, which thought of time as an endless cycle, the liturgical year communicated that time had a definite beginning and a definite end. The people were meant to learn through the Tabernacle and its schedule that God draws close to us in time and space. He is lord of our time, of *all* time and history. By his providence, all times and seasons are ordered. God invites us to live and work with him there. How exciting!

The world likes to marginalize the Christian as tangential to human history and anthropology. But God created time for man to worship in, and the Old Testament liturgical year, centered around the Tabernacle, provided the framework for the whole-life worship of his people that made them conscious of God's lordship over time and history.

The liturgical year lends itself to a sort of spiral timeline view, moving ever forward, upward, and toward the Day of Judgment. There are so many interesting things to learn about the ceremonies and rituals associated with each feast in the Jewish sacred calendar. There were other sacred times in the Old Testament liturgical year, but the major annual festivals were Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, Weeks, Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and Booths (Tabernacles).

The Sabbath is the basis for all the other Old Testament feasts and the blueprint of Christians' Sunday worship. The Sabbath commemorated God's Creation of the heavens and the earth, in which the Garden of Eden was a large temple (like the Holy of Holies) and the human person was made for worship. The content and sevenfold covenantal structure of Genesis 1–3 is itself liturgical, with the seventh day occupying Creation's high point. If Eden represents a Holy of Holies in God's "temple" of creation, the implication is that humanity, created for the mysterious intimacy of this inner sanctuary, is best understood as "liturgical man." Living in the Holy of Holies, humanity is called to give worship to God in every thought, word, and deed. Through the Sabbath, and now our Sunday, we learn that we must remain close to God and "keep time" with him in our tabernacles. Now we will turn our attention to the pilgrimage feasts.

PILGRIMAGE FEASTS

The First Festival Octave, Passover

The three major Jewish feasts—Passover, Weeks, and Booths—were pilgrimage festivals, because once the people settled in the Promised Land, every able-bodied male was called back to Jerusalem three times a year to celebrate and offer sacrifices in worship at the Temple with his countrymen (see Exodus 34:23).

Biblical ceremonial law regulated liturgy and worship and commemorates the principle saving event for the people. In addition to one day a week, God’s saving action in delivering his people from Egyptian slavery was so important that it required a whole week’s observance. A sort of weeklong Sabbath and the first “holy week,” the annual Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread reminded the people of God’s special care for them in the Exodus.

Initially, God sent Moses to ask Pharaoh to let the Hebrew slaves go to Mount Sinai to worship him. Pharaoh refused. God warned Pharaoh through Moses that he would send plagues if Pharaoh did not relent and let his people go. The last, most devastating of those plagues was the death of every firstborn of both man and beast in the kingdom.

The original Passover story is told in Exodus 12 (both “exodus” and “Moses” mean “drawn out,” or “leaving”). It was spring, March or early April. To protect them from the plague of the firstborn, God told the Hebrew people to kill a sacrificial spring lamb and splash its blood on their doorposts (see Exodus 12:13). The blood of the lamb was necessary because when the angel of death went through the Egyptian kingdom to administer the plague of death on every firstborn, he would “pass over” all the homes that had the sign of lamb’s blood on the doorposts.

That same night, they were to roast the lamb and eat it with unleavened bread in what would become an annual Hebrew communal meal. They could not share it with anyone from a different household, with anyone who was “passing through,” nor anyone who was not a circumcised Israelite (see Exodus 12:45-49), but every convert was an equal and was entitled to his share. Their bread had to be unleavened because they were in a hurry (see Exodus 12:11). God delivered them so swiftly and miraculously that first Passover, that they had no time to make preparations or wait for their bread to rise. Later, “leaven” (meaning to “sour” or “ferment”) became symbolic of sin in the Bible, as if to convey that on our pilgrimage home to heaven, we have no time to allow sin to ferment and take over our lives.

Like the Sabbath, the Passover feast was meant to be observed forever. “This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance for ever” (Exodus 12:14). The children of Israel were to keep the Passover and all the liturgical feasts as a perpetual covenant. For the Jewish people, feasts were forward-looking. The prophets understood the liturgical feasts to be typological of a new exodus, in which the Spirit would give a new law and the grace to live it (see Ezekiel 36). For the Jews, a “memorial” does not mean “to remember the past” in the way we recall something that happened previously in our lives. And it is not simply a remembrance of an important event that happened in Jewish history thousands of years before. When Jews celebrate the Passover, they “re-participate” in the Passover event in Egypt.

God’s people kept the Passover feast all the way to Jesus’ time, at which point he became the new Passover, the Paschal Lamb, in his person. We see in John 1:29 that John the Baptist calls Jesus the Lamb (*pasch*) of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is the fulfillment of all those many years of Old Testament sacrificial lambs.

The Passover lamb's body and blood removed the judgment of physical death from the Hebrew people during the first Old Covenant Passover, and they commemorated that event throughout their history. Jesus, the Lamb of God, established a New Covenant and a new Passover that would remove our *eternal, spiritual* death sentence.

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:26-28).

Jesus' words are an almost exact repeat of his teachings in John 6:

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (John 6:53-56).

Just as their ancestors had previously eaten the roasted lamb's body and marked their doorposts with its blood, the apostles were commanded to eat Jesus' Body and drink his Blood, and as often as they did, the effect of the covenant would be the forgiveness of sins (see Matthew 26:28). It was not by accident that Jesus instituted the Eucharist and was crucified as the sacrificial Lamb of God on the Jewish feasts of Unleavened Bread and Passover. Unlike the Passover lambs, whose blood caused the angel of death to "pass over" God's people, Jesus' Blood truly takes away the sin of the world, fulfilling these Old Covenant feasts in his own Body and Blood, so that they remain forever.

In a way similar to the Jewish people of the Old Testament, we consume the Lamb. His Blood is then applied to the "doorposts" of

our hearts, saving us from the eternal consequences of sin. Oh, how this truth makes my heart soar! Keeping this new Passover feast—the Eucharist—draws the Lamb into our hearts to dwell. Jesus comes to tabernacle with us through the Eucharist we celebrate at Mass every Sunday and every Easter. Because of this, Sunday is often called a “little Easter.”

The Old Testament Passover is fulfilled in Christ, who is our Passover. As St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8, “For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival.” This is important, because some Christians believe all feasts are legalistic and have been eliminated in the New Covenant. St. Paul taught and practiced otherwise. The Bible commands us to keep the feast. Catholics keep the New Covenant Passover feast—Easter. We do this daily and weekly at Mass and annually at Easter, along with our other liturgical celebrations.

Lord of the Seasons, the Feast of Weeks

I grew up living on a largely self-sufficient farm. Our orchards, vineyard, and enormous vegetable garden kept us busy and sweaty most of the year. My summers off from school were spent on those acres of land, stringing and breaking five-gallon buckets full of green beans in front of TV movies while my parents were at work. My mother spent hours canning and preserving hundreds of jars of corn, beans, tomatoes, pickles, squash, and peppers. Colorful quart jars of home-grown vegetables and fruit lined our cellar walls and nourished us all winter. For us, like many rural farmers, harvest time brought with it great celebration and fun.

During harvest time in the Old Testament, God instructed his people to keep him in mind as Harvest Giver through special festivals. They were to cease from work, gather at the Tabernacle, and present offerings of thanksgiving to him, the Lord of the Harvest. The Feast of Weeks was one such celebration, also known by a name more

familiar to us: Pentecost. The term “weeks” represented seven weeks of seven days. That is forty-nine days, plus the one on which the feast began, equaling fifty. Therefore, Pentecost was approximately a two-month festival that got its name from the Greek word for “fifty.” Pentecost formally began with the one-day Feast of First Fruits. The two feasts were quickly combined into one, however, so we will look at them together.

Leviticus 23:9-22 shows us that the Feasts of First Fruits and Pentecost were, together, a religious celebration of the grain harvest. Before the people could eat any of the grain of a new harvest, they were to bring a bundle to the Tabernacle in proportion to how much God had blessed them that year. The priest would “wave,” or elevate, the offerings before God as a gift of thanksgiving (see Leviticus 23:11). The offering was a little like a thanksgiving tithe, right off the top, and it acknowledged the people’s reliance on God’s faithful provision of the harvest. It was also an expectation that God would provide the rest of the harvest as his continued blessing. Like the others, these feasts were to last forever (see Leviticus 23:14).

The Jews looked forward, anticipating the coming Messiah, or Christ. As Christians, we look back to his first coming; his public ministry; his passion, death, and resurrection; and his ascension into heaven. We also look forward to the Second Coming and the “day” the feasts will no longer be required, as time shall be no more. Christians keep the new law of the Holy Spirit—to love one another—which Jesus commanded (see Romans 13:8-10). This law includes the feasts that help us love and remember the sacred occasions upon which Christianity is built. They keep us “in time” with God in a similar way that the former liturgical feasts did for God’s Chosen People.

The Birthday of the Church, First Fruits

As part of the Temple ceremony, at First Fruits, the priest would take some of the barley, lift it up, and wave it to God in the sight of all the people. One of the foundational doctrines of our Faith is the resurrection of Christ. This event was foreshadowed in the Feast of First Fruits. Not only did Jesus die on Passover, but he rose on the Feast of First Fruits. “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32). St. Paul connected the Resurrection to this feast when he said, “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20).

The Feast of Pentecost informally began with First Fruits, but while whole stalks of grain were waved before God in the Tabernacle at First Fruits, they were ground into flour and baked into loaves to offer to him with gifts of wine at Pentecost (see Leviticus 23:13-22). For the Jews, Pentecost also commemorated the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, which later Jewish rabbis purport to have happened fifty days after the people left Egypt (see Exodus 19:1-2).

During these seven weeks, the Israelites prepared themselves to receive the Torah through purity rituals that helped rid them of the residue of slavery and that consecrated them as a holy nation ready to stand before God. Rabbis compare this event to a wedding between God and his Chosen People.

With this feast schedule context in mind, Jesus, as a faithful Jew, gave his disciples careful instructions immediately after his resurrection, telling them to “wait for the promise of the Father,” the Holy Spirit:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on

each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4).

Remember that in the Old Testament, the Feast of Pentecost actually began with the one-day Feast of First Fruits. St. Paul uses the term “first fruits” in 1 Corinthians 15:17-23 to refer to the resurrection of Christ as the “first fruits” from the dead, because the Old Testament Feast of First Fruits corresponds with the New Testament resurrection of Christ, the “first fruit” of the bodily resurrection. If he is the “first fruit,” we are the fruit that follows. This is why we proclaim the following in the Nicene Creed every Sunday at Mass: “I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.”

Jesus also draws a connection between himself and a seed, saying the seed is somehow “glorified” by dying because in doing so, it produces a great harvest.

And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:23-24).

Pentecost is sometimes called the birthday of the Church, and the gift the Church received was the Holy Spirit, made possible by the death and resurrection of Christ. The disciples listened to Jesus’ instructions and waited prayerfully after his ascension. And on a feast ripe with the promise of harvest and the remembrance of Sinai, the Holy Spirit fell upon them as a loud, visible, life-giving “power from on high” (Luke 24:49). That particular Pentecost was the day of first fruits of the Church, the beginning of the great harvest of souls that would become the new people of God, the new “bride,” through the Holy Spirit. On that Pentecost, a new people of God was born of

the spiritual fertility of the Third Person of the Trinity, as St. Jerome poetically wrote:

There is Sinai, here Zion; there the trembling mountain, here the trembling house; there the flaming mountain, here the flaming tongues; there the noisy thunderings, here the sounds of many tongues; there the clangor of the rams horn, here the notes of the gospel-trumpet.

This Valley of Tears, the Feast of Booths

The final pilgrimage feast, the Feast of Booths, also called the Feast of Tabernacles, reminds us that God always provides for us while we are on this pilgrimage of wandering in the wilderness on our way to the Promised Land. The Hail Holy Queen prayer expresses this wandering, lost feeling beautifully: “To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.”

In the Feast of Tabernacles, God instructed the people to make themselves lean-tos out of branches and to camp outside in them for a week in remembrance of their journey through the wilderness (see Leviticus 23:39-42). The feast kept the people looking toward the eternal tabernacle while they wandered through the wilderness of life to the “motherland,” heaven.

YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW

As you can see, the Bible has quite a lot to say about planting and harvesting, but as we close out this chapter, we are going to look at a brief set of principles conveniently contained in a specific passage. The people of biblical times lived much closer to the land and seasons than we do. They understood these principles like they knew how to breathe. It may seem simplistic, but my mama always warned me with a lesson from the Bible growing up, and I never forgot it. The

passage is so important that I am including it here in its entirety. We are going to unpack the whole thing together:

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart (Galatians 6:7-9).

Consider getting some colored pencils, pens, or highlighters to make notes in your Bible. In the passage from Galatians, underline, “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked” (Galatians 6:7). This is as strong a warning as one sees in the Bible. Scripture warns us not to fool ourselves. God’s justice demands order, and that order is built into the cosmos. You *will* reap what you sow.

In a different color, draw a circle around, “Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7). At Creation, God established that everything would produce “according to its kind” (Genesis 1:11). We understand this naturally, but have you considered that it is true *spiritually* as well? Just as one cannot sow carrots and produce pumpkins or breed goats and get trout, so, too, one cannot sow sin and produce peace. We cannot sow antagonism and produce unity. We cannot sow lies and produce truth. We cannot sow selfishness and produce love. You will reap *what* you sow.

Choose another color and draw a box around, “He who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap” (Galatians 6:8). If we plant, we will harvest. We cannot harvest savings if we do not plant economy. If we do not plant disciplined, persistent, informed prayers, our lives will not produce holiness, peace, or spiritual fruit in ourselves or others. You will reap *if* you sow.

In a fourth color, draw an arrow pointing to “in due season” (Galatians 6:9). According to Genesis 8:22, “While the earth remains, seedtime

and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.” The harvest never comes immediately after planting, for while the earth abides, “there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). No harvest is produced immediately. What you sow now will surely take time to grow, “first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear” (Mark 4:28). But it will grow. We must not lose heart, grow discouraged, or quit. You reap *after* you sow, sometimes long after.

In a light color, highlight the words *flesh* and *corruption*, *Spirit* and *eternal life*. Seeds of the flesh tend toward complete rot; seeds of the Spirit tend toward abundant life. A single seed reaps a much bigger harvest. This principle is all over Scripture. “For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind” (Hosea 8:7). You reap *more than* what you sow.

So the principles of harvest are:

- You reap *what* you sow.
- You reap what you sow *in kind*.
- You reap *if* you sow.
- You reap *after* you sow.
- You reap *more than* you sow.

God’s activity in time and history constantly moves between the two poles of natural creation and supernatural grace and redemption. While nature produces what we naturally sow, namely death and sin, the Spirit produces redemption and life through supernatural grace.

We see this particularly in the differences between the feasts of the Old Testament and those of the New Testament. The Old Testament pilgrimage feasts and our later Christian feasts serve as annual reminders that our Creator still works miracles, granting his Spirit to those called to be the first fruits of his exponential spiritual

harvest, empowering them to carry out his work throughout history and the world. Through our liturgical celebrations, God calls us to a more deliberate participation in and remembrance of his action in our lives and the world. But we must first be faithful to sow what is good and give back to God.

Many people spend their income first on themselves and their families and then give to charity and the Church some part of what is left over. For those, the Bible is vocal that the law of sowing and reaping will not be circumvented:

You have looked for much, and lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? says the LORD of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while you busy yourselves each with his own house (Haggai 1:9).

The lessons of the liturgical feasts suggest, instead, that the first and best portion is due to God and that the concern of his kingdom is the first duty of our income. This is true because the harvest of my salary is first and foremost *God's* activity, not of my own power. Without the breath he gives me daily, I could not work, build, or earn anything at all.

SPIRAL STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN, A YEAR OF CELEBRATIONS

Catholics experience the passing of seasons, days, and hours as repeating cycles of meditations on the sacred mysteries of Christ. Like the Israelites, Catholics relive the action of God in history every year through the liturgical calendar, which is centered around the parish in a whole-life way. We re-present the Gospel with the whole community of God's people from Christ's birth and public ministry to his passion, death, resurrection, and ascension.

The Old Testament liturgical schedule was something of a repeating pattern, or template, for all religious history and time. God must have wanted his people to be celebrating all the time, because there were more feasts throughout the year that helped them balance work and play. The feasts had an immediate agricultural significance, and they also commemorated national events of the Israelites. Through the Church, we see that this is still true. God fulfilled and carried forward the old feasts and festivals into the Church and time through Christ so that they remained perpetual, as he commanded all those millennia ago. We know that keeping Christian feasts is really a participation of the heavenly celebration occurring as we speak, in anticipation of the final celebration of Christ's union with the Church at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb at the end of history. I find that a comforting meditation.

The Liturgy is the official divine worship of the Church (see CCC 1163–1171). Just as God commanded, it takes place within an annual liturgical calendar, is centered in the parish, and is a “whole-life” endeavor that helps us balance work and rest.

The overarching point of this schedule is that we both remember salvation past and anticipate salvation future. Therefore, the liturgical calendar is not just a bunch of random days that require us to go to Mass, give us days off, and offer fun family traditions and happy songs. No one “makes” or “invents” liturgical worship.

The Old Testament liturgical schedule was established by God and centered around the Tabernacle, foreshadowing our Church's liturgical year. The Church's feast days are days of obligation, like those of the Old Testament, and include rest, worship, offerings, and gathering of God's people. Isn't it marvelous that through the holy days of the Church, especially Sundays, we participate in the heavenly celebration occurring right now? At Mass, especially, we

connect with the angels and the saints who are already celebrating in heaven.

By keeping time with God through the liturgical year, the Church on earth shows it is united with the liturgy of heaven. How wonderful that our liturgical calendar points us to heaven, in which we will ultimately worship in communion forever with Jesus. Amen! It was this sense of connectedness to past, present, and future saints that made my first Easter as a Catholic so meaningful to me.

From the time of the Mosaic law, the People of God have observed fixed feasts, beginning with Passover, to commemorate the astonishing actions of the Savior God, to give him thanks for them, to perpetuate their remembrance, and to teach new generations to conform their conduct to them. In the age of the Church, between the Passover of Christ already accomplished once for all, and its consummation in the kingdom of God, the liturgy celebrated on fixed days bears the imprint of the newness of the mystery of Christ (CCC 1164).

LET'S REVIEW

The Catholic Church has a liturgical year because:

- The Old Testament liturgical schedule was established by God and centered around the Tabernacle, foreshadowing our Church's liturgical year.
- Through the Old Testament Sabbath, God indicated his perpetual desire that man rest and worship in imitation of his own Sabbath rest and look forward to our final, heavenly rest.
- The Church's feast days are days of obligation, like those of the Old Testament, that include rest, worship, offerings, and gathering of God's people.
- Through our holy days, especially Sunday and Easter, we participate in the heavenly liturgy and communion feast.
- At Mass, we connect with the angels and the saints who are already celebrating in heaven.
- Our liturgical calendar points us to heaven, in which we will ultimately worship in communion forever with Jesus.
- We cannot live in the closest possible relationship with God if our time is not centered and ordered in him and his Church.

INVITATION

Like the Israelites in the Old Testament, Catholics relive the action of God in history every year through the liturgical year. We “represent” the Gospel from Christ’s incarnation and birth, to his passion, ascension, and reign. In spring, he enters the world in Mary’s immaculate womb; in winter, he is born, circumcised, and named. He is raised in the Holy Family and meets his cousin John. He goes into the desert—and we go with him—during Lent. We follow him through his passion, which is soon vanquished by his resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost. Now he reigns, and we await his second coming as we prepare to celebrate his first coming again. Then the cycle begins again, like a wheel that has been spinning for two millennia. When we participate in this spiral of remembrance and anticipation by celebrating the feasts of the Church, God lives intimately in time and history with us. Let us pray.

God Prompt – LOVE the Word™

L **LISTEN:** “You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you” (Exodus 31:13).

O **OBSERVE:** What is the most significant statement or Scripture passage you read in this chapter?

Do you desire refreshing from the Lord? In what area of your life do you need his rest?

How has God spoken to you in this chapter about how you treat Sundays and other holy days?

What steps can you take to make Sunday a more holy day, a day of rest, for yourself and your family?

V **VERBALIZE:** Lord, you have shown me that my primary challenge about Sunday obligation is ...

Lord, I sense you calling me to a more restful, reverent Sunday. In all honesty, I am probably experiencing very little mental, emotional, and spiritual rest because I rest and worship so little on Sundays. One way I commit to making my Sundays more restful and worshipful is by ...

E **ENTRUST:** *Lord, I believe it is your desire to be present with us in all of our work and rest and in all of our days, weeks, and years. Help us make your holy days more holy, especially by being faithful in gathering at church and giving our souls a Sunday. We commit these feasts more carefully to you, and we thank you for the gift of rest!*

