

Spirit of the Season

Guide to Holydays of Obligation

www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/SOS

What is Obligation?

On Sundays and other holydays of obligation, the faithful are obliged to participate in the Mass. They are also to abstain from such work or business that would inhibit the worship to be given to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, or the due relaxation of mind and body.

(Code of Canon Law #1247)

Sunday: foremost holy day of obligation

Jesus rose from the dead 'on the first day of the week.' Because it is the 'first day', the day of Christ's Resurrection recalls the first creation. Because it is the 'eighth day' following the sabbath, it symbolizes the new creation ushered in by Christ's Resurrection. For Christians it has become the first of all days, the first of all feasts, the Lord's Day (*dies dominica*) – Sunday:

The Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church's life. 'Sunday is the day on which the paschal mystery is celebrated in light of the apostolic tradition and is to be observed as the foremost holy day of obligation in the universal Church.' *(Catechism of the Catholic Church 2174, 2177)*

Summary of Dates

	2007	2008	2009	2010
Lectionary (Sunday/Weekday)	C/I	A/II	B/I	C/II
First Sunday of Advent	3 December 2006	2 December 2007	30 November 2008	29 November 2009
Epiphany	7 January	6 January	4 January	3 January
Ash Wednesday	21 February	6 February	25 February	17 February
Easter Sunday	8 April	23 March	12 April	4 April
Ascension	20 May	4 May	24 May	16 May
Pentecost	27 May	11 May	31 May	23 May
The Body and Blood of Christ	10 June	25 May	14 June	6 June
St Peter & St Paul	29 June	29 June	28 June	29 June
Assumption	15 August	15 August	16 August	15 August
All Saints	1 November	2 November	1 November	31 October

From the First Sunday of Advent 2006 there is a new arrangement of Holydays of Obligation for England and Wales. In this special supplement to Spirit of the Season there is background information about Holydays of Obligation together with a look at some of the implications for schools: the relationship between Sundays and the prayer life of the school, and the question of when to celebrate Mass.

The guide starts with an exploration of two ideas: Holydays and Obligation. Any celebration should be marked by both characteristics of the day.

For more information see the Holydays page on the Liturgy Office website:

www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Calendar/Holydays.html

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What are Holydays?

The Code of Canon Law establishes the following Holydays of Obligation:

- Sunday
- The Birth of the Lord (25 December)
- The Epiphany of the Lord (6 January)
- The Ascension of the Lord (Thursday Week 6 of Easter)
- The Body and Blood of Christ (Thursday after Holy Trinity)
- Mary, Mother of God (1 January)
- The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary (8 December)
- The Assumption of the Virgin Mary into Heaven (15 August)
- Joseph, Husband of the Virgin Mary (19 March)
- Peter and Paul, apostles (29 June)
- All Saints (1 November)

The Code also establishes that, with the prior approval of the Holy See, Episcopal Conferences may suppress certain holydays or transfer them to the Sunday. (*Code of Canon Law* 1246)

Holydays in England and Wales 2007

From the First Sunday of Advent, 2006 the following are Holydays of Obligation in England and Wales.

- Sunday
- The Birth of the Lord (25 December)
- The Assumption of the Virgin Mary into Heaven (15 August)
- Peter and Paul, apostles (29 June)
- All Saints (1 November)

In England and Wales when St Peter & St Paul, The Assumption or All Saints falls on a Saturday or a Monday the feast is transferred to the adjacent Sunday. This is, in part, to avoid confusion about what should be celebrated at a Saturday or Sunday Evening Mass.

Changes to Holydays

In England and Wales the Epiphany of the Lord, the Ascension of the Lord and the Body and Blood of Christ are no longer Holydays of Obligations. This change was made by the Bishops' Conference and ratified by the Holy See. When the obligation is removed from these 3 days the feast is automatically moved to the nearest Sunday.

Frequently Asked Questions

What has happened to the Epiphany, the Ascension & Corpus Christi?

When the obligation is removed from these 3 feasts of the Lord the celebration is moved to the nearest Sunday: for the Ascension and Corpus Christi it is the following Sunday; for the Epiphany it is the Sunday which falls between 2-8 January.

How can I find out the dates?

Dates up to 2010 are given on page 1. The Liturgy Office website has more information including a pdf of moveable feasts up to 2040. www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Calendar/Holydays.html

Have we lost the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord?

No. The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is usually celebrated on the Sunday following the Epiphany. When the Epiphany falls on either the 7 or 8 January the Baptism of the Lord is celebrated on the following Monday (i.e. 8 or 9 January).

Can we keep them on the 'old' days in school?

No. This would lead to great confusion. It would raise questions such as whether going to Mass for the Ascension on the Thursday fulfil the obligation for Sunday's proper celebration of the Ascension with the rest of the Church. Holydays are agreed for a particular area, England and Wales, and so are celebrated at the one time in that area.

How should we mark the day in School?

For comments about celebrating Holydays (St Peter & St Paul & All Saints) see below. The former days now count as ordinary weekdays: a weekday before or after the Epiphany, Thursday in the 6th Week of Easter and Thursday in a week in Ordinary Time. The liturgical books, the Missal and the Lectionary, already make provision for when these days are transferred to a Sunday.

What about other countries?

Many other countries already transfer these days to the nearest Sunday. It is interesting to note that in Europe where these days are kept on their original days it is often a public holiday as Christmas Day is for us. This makes it easier to fulfil the Church's wish that these days are marked by both Mass and rest.

Celebrating Holydays

Holydays are ranked as Solemnities so Mass is celebrated with both the Gloria and the Creed and there are 3 readings. But more than that they should be celebrated in a manner which is fitting:

- The careful preparation of the liturgy including suitable Intercessions
- The importance of singing (especially the Gospel Acclamation, Eucharistic Acclamations)
- The importance of the homily

Sunday and Schools

The changes to Holydays of Obligation reminds us of the importance of Sunday in the life of the Church.

In introducing the change Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor said, 'In order to foster the celebration of the rhythm of the liturgical year and to celebrate more profoundly the mysteries of the life and mission of the Lord, the Bishops have decided to transfer to Sunday those Holy Days of Obligation which are Solemnities of the Lord (other than Christmas Day). This means that the Epiphany, the Ascension of the Lord and Corpus Christi will now be celebrated on Sunday.'

The Bishops commend this as an opportunity for Catholics to deepen, through catechesis and celebration, their faith and understanding of these mysteries of the life of Christ.'

Sunday is the 'foremost Holyday of Obligation' and over the Sundays of the year the mystery of Christ is unfolded. Not only is every Sunday a celebration of the Paschal Mystery, Christ's saving death and resurrection at Easter, but also through the reading of the Gospel in the Liturgy of the Word, the birth, life and teaching of Jesus is told.

The life and teaching of Christ is obviously also the subject of RE lessons. The knowledge that is gained in study is deepened in the celebration of liturgy. The liturgy assumes that we come to it 'knowing the story', that we have heard it before. Like the best stories it is in the retelling that we discover something new. The liturgy is not the place, therefore, to give a lesson; rather it is the place to discover the echoes of that story in our own lives and in God's saving plan.

- The provision of proper times of silence for recollection, meditation and prayer.

Ideally the liturgy of a Solemnity should be a celebration of greater joy in comparison with, say, an Ordinary Sunday.

Some schools can help lead the liturgy in the local parish, whereas others hold one of the parish Masses in the school. Some parishes are encouraging families to come together to an Evening Mass and ensuring greater involvement of young people in that Mass.

The following is an extract from the recently published '*Spiritual Garments*' looking at ways schools can draw on the Sunday liturgy.

Sunday and School

Sunday is 'the day of the Lord' and the principal day in each week when the Christian community comes together for the Eucharist. Schools are not expected to supply a replacement for the Sunday Mass that many of the children may not have been able to participate in. What we can consider is celebrating a short Liturgy of the Word on the Monday using the Gospel reading from the day before. Here we are not 're-celebrating' the Sunday event but reflecting upon the scripture together and seeing how it can affect our lives together in the coming week, listening to how the word can echo and resonate for us as individuals and as a school community. This is known as 'mystagogy' – leading the newly initiated baptised person into greater reflection on the mysteries already celebrated.

Each Monday we have an assembly with the whole school (nursery to year 6 plus all the staff) to celebrate the scripture of the previous day.

Every class brings its prayer candle which is lit from the large central candle on a low table in front of the children. We begin with a greeting and the sign of the cross followed by a proclamation of the Gospel, read by the head teacher from a wooden lectern covered in the cloth in the colour of the liturgical season. Occasionally we choose the first reading or psalm instead. There is a time of quiet reflection followed by a brief exploration of the Gospel, led by a member of staff, of what the text may mean to us in our home lives, in our school lives and in relation to the world, We end with a short communal prayer, dismissal and song.

Spiritual Garments by Julie McCann,
Decani Books, 2006.

When should we celebrate Mass?

It was in July 06 that the changes to Holydays were announced. This obviously came as a surprise to schools which had already made plans for next academic year. Now that the surprise has passed this change provides an opportunity for schools to reflect on how often they celebrate Mass and when it might be celebrated.

This article does not even begin to propose what a solution might be for any school. Schools have built up different practices due to a number of factors: the traditions of the school, the expectations of staff and governors, the availability of priests or whether there is suitable space within the school for the celebration of Mass by the whole school community or smaller groups.

Any conversation should obviously involve staff and governors, but it may be helpful, in some areas, to look at the issue as a deanery. A factor in the decision to make the change was the difficulty either for some priests to respond to all the demands made on them or for some schools to find a priest. These issues will still apply on the two Holydays which regularly happen in term time: St Peter and St Paul, and All Saints, but new solutions may be found.

Another group that might be/should be considered is the parents of the children. In many schools Mass on holydays has been an opportunity not only to invite parents to attend but also to provide a point of contact with parents who are weaker in their faith practice. The needs of this group should be remembered in any conversation. Consideration might also be given to whether the preparation of the liturgy in school seeks to enable the participation of the parents within the whole assembly rather than see them as passive observers.

- To begin the conversation it would be useful to have a record of the current pattern.
- The first stage would be to identify those times when the celebration of Mass would be seen as essential – this would include the Holydays of Obligation.
- It is natural that a priority will be given to significant events in the life of the school: beginning and end of the year, leaving Masses etc.

- Look at the days to which the Church gives priority: Solemnities and Feasts of the Lord (see www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Calendar/Info/background2.html#Feast). Which would fit in with the school calendar. Or more strongly which should the school calendar fit in with?
- Of particular importance would be the celebration of the Patronal Solemnity of the School i.e. St Thomas More.
- In a similar way the following should be considered: the Patronal Solemnity of the Parish (if different), the Anniversary of the Dedication of the Parish, diocesan patrons, or, if a religious Order is/has been associated with the school the feast day of the founder or other significant saint. Are there occasions when it would be appropriate to join the local parish for Mass.
- Where Mass is not celebrated on these occasions how might they be marked in the prayer life of the school?
- For some schools it may make sense to celebrate Mass on a regular basis, for example, every half term. These may be tied to the liturgical seasons, such as an Easter Mass. Such celebrations should, as a rule, use the Readings and other texts of the day.
- The pattern of and the relationship between Masses for the whole school and smaller constituent groups might be looked at.
- The question may arise whether Mass is always the most appropriate way to celebrate. This may be based on the availability of a priest and the ability to prepare and celebrate worthily in the given time or space. Any review might consider whether enough time is allocated for the celebration of Mass.

Whatever pattern of celebration is decided upon it should be reviewed and evaluated. Regular radical change should be avoided; rather the celebration of Mass should be seen as a regular and an integral part of the pattern of worship of the school.

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