

SEGMENT SEVENTEEN

**THEME: THE LITURGICAL YEAR, THE LECTIONARY
AND THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS**

OPENING PRAYER / SCRIPTURE READING:

Evening Prayer

INSTRUCTORS' SUMMARY STATEMENTS:

The “Liturgical Year” is the annual cycle or calendar in which the Church relives the saving events of 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 observing the liturgical calendar the Church sanctifies time itself.

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 through the ministry of the Church made present to us throughout the liturgical year.

The RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) 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.

The “Liturgy of the Hours” or the “Divine Office,” is the public and daily prayer of the entire Church that sanctifies the whole course of each day by the praise of God. The Word of God is read and meditated in the liturgical celebration so that it becomes prayer thus permeating and transforming the time of each day with prayer.

- ❖ 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. (CCC 1171)
- ❖ The central event of the liturgical year is the Easter Triduum – the three days of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil. “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.” CCC 1168
- ❖ 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 season has a time of preparation and celebration, a time of conversion and rejoicing
- ❖ 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.
- ❖ 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.
- ❖ 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 gold or white. In Ordinary Time the color green is used to reflect the liturgical season.
- ❖ Other cycles in the Church's year include the cycle of saints and martyrs, the daily and Sunday lectionary cycle and the cycle for holy years. In the cycle of saints the Church celebrates feast days and holy days in honor of Mary, the Mother of God and the saints.
- ❖ “Holy days of obligation” in the liturgical year are: Christmas, Solemnity of Mary, Ascension Thursday, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Assumption of Mary, and All Saints Day

- ❖ Sunday is the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. It symbolizes the new creation begun in the power of Christ's resurrection. (CCC 2174)
- ❖ 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. It is the foremost holy day of obligation in the Church. (CCC 2174 – 2188)
- ❖ The "Liturgy of the Hours" is the public prayer of the Church that flows from and leads to celebration of the Eucharist. Through our participation in the prayers of the day – Morning Prayer, Noon Prayer, Evening Prayer and Night Prayer, each part of the day is made holy by the praise of God and the study of God's word. (CCC 1174 –1178)
- ❖ The Lectionary is the cycle of selections of readings from the Bible for Sundays, major feasts and daily readings. By following the three year Sunday lectionary cycles (A, B and C) or the two year daily cycle (years 1 and 2) Catholics hear extended segments of the Bible during liturgical worship.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

The following questions may be used by the RCIA team to guide large or small group discussions during weekly RCIA meetings. They may also be given to the participants as a basis for personal reflection during the week.

1. How has your appreciation of the Church's liturgical year grown during the RCIA?
2. What is the importance of Sunday, as the Sabbath or Lord's Day?
3. How can you incorporate the Liturgy of the Hours into your daily prayers?
4. How might the lectionary readings assist in your daily or weekly study of the Bible?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES/QUOTATIONS:

Psalm 118: 24

1 Thessalonians 5: 17

Ephesians 6: 18

Exodus 20: 8-10; 31:15

Deuteronomy 5: 12-15

“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.” Universal Catechism, 1169

“We all gather on the day of the sun, for it is the first day (after the Jewish Sabbath, but also the first day) when God, separating matter from darkness, made the world; and on this same day Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead.” Saint Justin Martyr, *Apologia*, A.D.155

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Chapter V, “The Liturgical Year,” articles 102 – 111.

Universal Catechism, CCC 1168 – 1178

Pope John Paul II, *The Day of the Lord, Dies Domini*, May 31, 1998

CLOSING PRAYER

Compline or Night Prayer