

# The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults

by Fr. Antony

## The Liturgical Year

The Church has her own special liturgical year and calendar in which she presents the history and unchanging mysteries of our salvation. The Church calendar is the series of liturgical seasons throughout the year that determines daily Scripture readings, as well as the daily assignment of saints' feast days and other commemorations. The church reflects the whole salvation history during this liturgical year. The Catholic Church believes that the calendar helps to create harmony and unity among its vast number of churches and dioceses throughout the world. Vatican II stresses the importance of this unity.

*“Holy Mother Church is conscious that she must celebrate the saving work of her divine Spouse by devoutly recalling it on certain days throughout the course of the year .... Within the cycle of a year, moreover, she unfolds the whole mystery of Christ, not only from His incarnation and birth until His ascension, but also as reflected in the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of a blessed, hoped for return of the Lord”*

**(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Par. 102).**

So although parts of the Mass always remain the same, others change according to what is right and proper for the season, or the particular feast being celebrated.

### THE DIVISION OF THE LITURGICAL YEAR

**Advent:** The liturgical year begins with Advent, lasting four weeks.

**Christmas:** The Christmas season begins with midnight Mass on Christmas Eve and continues through the day celebrated as Christ's baptism in early January.

**Ordinary Time:** This first section of Ordinary time lasts six to nine weeks depending on the date of Easter. It begins with the baptism of Jesus.

**Lent:** Lent is a period of preparation for Easter, which is the focal point of the liturgical year. Lent ends with the beginning of the Easter triduum at the Mass of the Lord's Supper in Holy Thursday. The Easter triduum consists of Holy Thursday, Good Friday through to evening prayer on Easter Sunday.

**Easter:** Easter is a season and not just a day. It begins on Easter morning and continues through to Pentecost. Included in this season are the feasts of Jesus' Ascension and

Pentecost.

**Ordinary Time (again):** This period consists of twenty-seven weeks.

## **ADVENT**

With the beginning of the season of Advent, we begin a new liturgical year. Advent comes from the Latin word for an “arrival” or a “coming”. Advent has two-fold meaning. It is the time to prepare for Christmas. It reminds us about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, in our humanity and our God in His divinity, which happened two thousand years ago. But in the Church’s great feast of Christmas, He mystically comes again. Second, the Lord, will come to judge the living and the dead in the Second Coming. Advent is celebrated as a time of joy and happiness as we await the coming of the King. Advent is a time of preparation that is marked by prayer. In the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Season of Advent has been a time of fasting and penance for sins similar to the Season of Lent.

## **THE ADVENT WREATH**

The Advent wreath is a symbol of the beginning of the Church year (advent) in churches as well as homes. It is a circular evergreen wreath with five candles, four around the wreath and one in the center.

The circle of the wreath reminds us of God Himself, His eternity and endless mercy, which has no beginning or end. The green of the wreath speaks of the hope that we have in God, the hope of newness, of renewal, of eternal life. Candles symbolize the light of God coming into the world through the birth of His son. The four outer candles represent the period of waiting during the four Sundays of Advent. It also symbolizes the four centuries of waiting between the prophet Malachi and the birth of Christ. The center candle is white and is called the Christ Candle. It is traditionally lit on Christmas Eve or Day, which reminds us that the incarnation is the heart of the season, giving light to the world.

The colors of the candles are usually three purple, corresponding to the sanctuary colors of Advent, and one pink or rose candle. One of the purple candles is lit the first Sunday of Advent, a Scripture is read, a short devotional or reading is given, and a prayer offered. The pink candle is usually lighted on the third Sunday of Advent. The light reminds us that Jesus is the light of the world that comes into the darkness of our lives to bring newness, life, and hope. It also reminds us that we are called to be a light to the world.