

Chapter VII: Christmastide through Candlemas

The Christmas Octave

35. Christmas has its own octave, arranged as follows:

- a. Sunday within the octave is the feast of the Holy Family;
- b. 26 December is the feast of Saint Stephen, First Martyr;
- c. 27 December is the feast of Saint John, Apostle and Evangelist;
- d. 28 December is the feast of the Holy Innocents;
- e. 29, 30, and 31 December are days within the octave;
- f. 1 January, the octave day of Christmas, is the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. It also recalls the conferral of the holy Name of Jesus.

36. The Sunday falling between 2 January and 5 January is the Second Sunday after Christmas. [R7]

37. Epiphany is celebrated on 6 January, unless (where it is not observed as a holyday of obligation) it has been assigned to the Sunday occurring between 2 January and 8 January ([see no. 7](#)).

38. The Sunday falling after 6 January is the feast of the Baptism of the Lord

[R7] Query: What Mass is to be celebrated on the Second Sunday after Christmas?

Reply: The Mass to be provided by the reformed Roman Missal; otherwise, the Mass in the current Roman Missal for the Sunday after Christmas: *Notitiae* 5 (1969) 325, no. 6..

The Christmas Lectionary¹

Sundays & Feasts

The Gospel on the Sunday within the Octave of Christmas, Feast of the Holy Family, is about Jesus' childhood and the other readings are about the virtues of family life. On the Octave Day of Christmas, Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, the readings are about the Virgin Mother of God and the giving of the holy Name of Jesus. On the second Sunday after Christmas, the readings are about the mystery of the Incarnation. On the Epiphany of the Lord, the Old Testament reading and the Gospel continue the Roman tradition; the text for the reading from the Letters of the Apostles is about the calling of the nations to salvation. On the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, the texts chosen are about this mystery.

Christmas Weekday Readings

From 29 December on, there is a continuous reading of the whole of the First Letter of John, which actually begins earlier, on 27 December, the Feast of St. John the Evangelist, and on 28 December, the Feast of the Holy Innocents. The Gospels relate manifestations of the Lord: events of Jesus' childhood from the Gospel of Luke (29-30 December); passages from the first chapter of the Gospel of John (31 December-5 January); other manifestations of the Lord from the four Gospels (7-12 January).

Comites Christi

Several saints' days fall within the Octave of Christmas are also a part of the "Twelve Days of Christmas." By placing their feasts near the birth of the Lord, the Church is suggesting that there is a special spiritual proximity as well. St. Stephen (December 26) is the "Proto-Martyr," the first disciple of our Lord to be martyred. St. John (December 27) is the "beloved disciple" who

¹ *Lectionary for Mass*, Introduction, nos. 95-96.

rested on our Lord's bosom during the Last Supper. And the Holy Innocents (December 28) are obviously connected in a special way to our Lord's infancy.

In our own times, children suffer innumerable forms of violence which threaten their lives, dignity and right to education. On this day, it is appropriate to recall the vast host of children not yet born who have been killed under the cover of laws permitting abortion, which is an abominable crime. Mindful of these specific problems, popular piety in many places has inspired acts of worship as well as displays of charity which provide assistance to pregnant mothers, encourage adoption and the promotion of the education of children.²

These saints are called the *Comites Christi*, "the companions of Christ," and as that name implies, they are not only close to Him, but they have a certain nobility (the word *comes*, from which we get our word "count," also implies aristocracy). It is for these reasons, incidentally, that the Eastern churches honor the Apostles, Peter and Paul, on December 28.

St. Thomas Becket (December 29), the Archbishop of Canterbury who was killed by the king's men in 1170 on this day, would have normally seen his feast transferred to a date outside the Octave of Christmas. However, because his martyrdom was such a shock and outrage to Christendom, the Roman authorities deemed it appropriate to leave his "spiritual birthday" exactly where it was, thereby adding him to the list of Christ's nobility.

The final *comes Christi* is St. Sylvester I (December 31), the great pope who lived to see the Roman persecutions of the Church finally end during the reign of Emperor Constantine. It is therefore appropriate to honor this saint within the Octave that celebrates "peace on earth," especially on the day before the new civic year.

December 27 - Saint John's Day - Blessing of Wine

Wine is traditionally blessed on St. John's Day in remembrance of the legend that St. John safely drank poisoned wine offered to him by his enemy after blessing it. It is also an act of reconciliation to share a cup of wine with an 'enemy' on this day. It was on this day in 1983 that Pope John Paul II visited Mehmet Ali Agca (the man who had shot him two years earlier) in prison and shared a cup of wine with him. The ritual below is taken from the *Book of Blessings*, numbers 1781-ff.

"Blessing of Food or Drink or Other Elements Connected with Devotion"

1781 On the occasion of a feast or season of the liturgical year or in honor of Mary or other saints, it is customary in some places to celebrate a rite for the blessing of food or drink (for example, bread, water, wine, oil) or of other articles that the faithful devoutly present to be blessed. In such a celebration parish priests (pastors) are to ensure that the faithful have a correct understanding of the true meaning of the blessing. In his comments or homily the celebrant is as far as possible to take into account traditions and biographical information on the saints that may serve to clarify the origin and meaning of the special blessing celebrated in honor of a saint. There must always be respect for historical accuracy.

1782 Whenever a priest or a deacon carries out this kind of celebration in a church, a large attendance and the active participation of the faithful are desirable.

1783 When several kinds of food or drink or other articles are to be blessed, there is to be no duplication of rites, but everything is to be blessed in a single rite, in which the proper blessing formulary is used for each particular object.

1784 While maintaining the structure and chief elements of the rite, the celebrant should adapt the celebration to the circumstances of the place and the people involved.

² DPPL, no.113.

1785 Celebration of these blessings within Mass, by use of the rite in nos. 1799-1804, is permitted only on feasts of Mary or the saints in places where there is a popular tradition for such a celebration and the faithful customarily attend Mass on these days. The blessing may be celebrated within Mass only once on any day.

I. ORDER OF BLESSING OUTSIDE MASS

INTRODUCTORY RITES

1786 When the community has gathered, a suitable song may be sung. After the singing, the celebrant says: **In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**

All make the sign of the cross and reply: **Amen.**

1787 The celebrant greets those present in the following or other suitable words, taken mainly from sacred Scripture. **May God, who has chosen us to be saints, be with you all.**

All make the following or some other suitable reply. **And also with you.**

1788 In the following or similar words, the celebrant prepares those present for the blessing:

God makes known his mighty power and his abounding goodness to all the ends of the earth; but he also directs his Church to bless the simplest and most commonplace things. He does so in order that all who devoutly make use of material things (while invoking the name of Mary/of the saints) may be drawn to the world that is not seen and may give glory to God, who alone performs the wonders we call miracles, but who is wonderful also in his saints.

READING OF THE WORD OF GOD

1789 A reader, another person present, or the celebrant reads a text of sacred Scripture, taken either from the Lectionary for Mass or from those given here.

Brothers and sisters, listen to the words of the holy gospel according to John:

John 2:1-11

You have kept the best wine till now.

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding.

When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."

(And) Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come."

His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you."

Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, "Fill the jars with water." So they filled them to the brim.

Then he told them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it.

And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now."

Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.

1791 Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 104 **R. Bless the Lord, O my soul!**

*From ravines you make springs gush forth into watercourses that wind among the mountains;
they give drink to all the beasts of the field: the wild asses quench their thirst;
the birds of heaven dwell on their banks; from among the branches they send forth their song.
From your towering palace you water the hills; the earth drinks its fill of your gift.*

*You make grass grow for cattle and plants for man's use,
that he may bring forth bread from the earth,
and wine to gladden man's heart,
oil to make his face glisten, and bread to strengthen his heart.*

*The trees of the Lord drink their fill, the cedars he planted on Lebanon;
there, the sparrows make their nest; in the treetops the stork has its home;
for the wild goats there are the mountains; for the rock-badgers, the boulders and cliffs.*

*May the glory of the Lord last forever!
May the Lord take pleasure in all his works!
He looks at the earth and it trembles; he touches the mountains and they smoke.
I will sing to the Lord all my life! I will sing for joy in my God as long as I live!*

1792 In the homily the celebrant explains both the biblical text and the meaning of the rite.

INTERCESSIONS

1793 As circumstances suggest, the prayer of blessing may be preceded by the intercessions. Intercessions that are best suited to the feast or liturgical season may be composed. The celebrant introduces them and an assisting minister or one of those present announces the intentions. The intentions are followed immediately by the prayer of blessing, no. 1795.

PRAYER OF BLESSING

1794 When there are no intercessions, the celebrant, before the prayer of blessing, says: **Let us pray.** As circumstances suggest, all may then pray for a moment in silence before the prayer of blessing.

1795 With hands outstretched, the celebrant says the prayer of blessing.

B) Blessing of wine:

Blessed are you, Lord God, who fill the hungry and satisfy the thirsty, and give us wine to gladden our hearts. Grant that all who drink this wine in remembrance of Saint John the Beloved, who rested his head on your bosom during the Last Supper, may always rejoice in you and be invited to sit at your heavenly banquet for ever and ever.

R. Amen.

1796 If this is the local custom, the objects blessed may now be sprinkled with holy water.

CONCLUDING RITE

1797 With hands outstretched over the faithful, the celebrant concludes the rite by saying: **May God look with favor on your devotion and in his goodness give you the help you need.**

R. Amen.

May he give you serenity in your life and shower you with his blessings.

R. Amen.

May he rule over you with his strength and tender care in this life, so that he may raise you up to the reward of happiness in heaven.

R. Amen.

Then he blesses all present.

And may almighty God bless you all, the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit.

R. Amen.

1798 It is preferable to end the celebration with a suitable song.

At the family home, the wine is poured into a glass by the father/head of the household, who drinks and passes it first to a spouse, and then around the table to children and guests, in commemoration of the disciple of love.

A greeting showing that it is love that binds the family together goes round with the cup:

“Drink to the love of St. John, the Apostle.”

The next member of the family responds, **And where love is, there is God,”** takes the cup and drinks from it until all have shared from the cup of blessed wine.

Holy Family Sunday

The feast of the holy family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph (Sunday in the Christmas octave) is a festive occasion particularly suitable for the celebration of rites or moments of prayer proper to the Christian family. The recollection of Joseph, Mary and Jesus’ going up to Jerusalem, together with other observant Jewish families, for the celebration of the Passover (cf. Lk 2, 41-42), should normally encourage a positive acceptance of the pastoral suggestion that all members of the family attend Mass on this day. This feast day also affords an opportunity for the renewal of our entrustment to the patronage of the Holy Family of Nazareth; the blessing of children as provided in the ritual; and where opportune, for the renewal of marriage vows taken by the spouses on their wedding day, and also for the exchange of promises between those engaged to be married in which they formalize their desire to found a new Christian family.³

December 31 - The Last Day of the Year

The Turning of the Year: Endings and Beginnings

Popular piety has given rise to many pious exercises connected with 31 December. In many parts of the Western world the end of the civil year is celebrated on this day. This anniversary affords an opportunity for the faithful to reflect on “the mystery of time”, which passes quickly and inexorably. Such should give rise to a dual feeling: of penance and sorrow for the sins committed during the year and for the lost occasions of grace; and of thanks to God for the graces and blessings He has given during the past year.

These sentiments have given rise to two pious exercises: prolonged exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, which afford an opportunity for the faithful and many religious communities for silent prayer; and the singing of the *Te Deum* as an act of community praise and thanksgiving to God for the graces received from Him as the year draws to a close.

In some places, especially in monasteries and in associations of the faithful with a particular devotion to the Holy Eucharist, 31 December is marked by a vigil of prayer which concludes with the celebration of the Holy Mass. Such vigils are to be encouraged and should be celebrated in harmony with the liturgical content of the Christmas Octave, and not merely as a reaction to the thoughtless dissipation with which society celebrates the passage from one year to another, but as a vigil offering of the new year to the Lord.⁴

January 1 - Mary, the Mother of God

World Day of Prayer for Peace - January 1 (Mary the Mother of God)

In response to the tragedies of September 11, 2001, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have designated January 1 a Day of Prayer for Peace. The bishops’ declaration urges Catholics to pray the rosary on January 1, seeking the intercession of the Virgin Mary under her title “Queen of Peace.”

³ DPPL, no.112.

⁴ DPPL, no. 114.

The Holy See shares the profound aspirations of all people for peace. Since 1967, 1 January has been designated “world day for peace”.

Popular piety has not been oblivious to this initiative of the Holy See. In the light of the new born Prince of Peace, it reserves this day for intense prayer for peace, education towards peace and those value inextricably linked with it, such as liberty, fraternal solidarity, the dignity of the human person, respect for nature, the right to work, the sacredness of human life, and the denunciation of injustices which trouble the conscience of man and threaten peace.⁵

Popular Piety and the Solemnity of the Holy Mother of God⁶

On New Year’s Day, the octave day of Christmas, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Holy Mother of God. The divine and virginal motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a singular salvific event: for Our Lady it was the foretaste and cause of her extraordinary glory; for us it is a source of grace and salvation because “through her we have received the Author of life”.

The solemnity of the 1 January, an eminently Marian feast, presents an excellent opportunity for liturgical piety to encounter popular piety: the first celebrates this event in a manner proper to it; the second, when duly catechized, lends joy and happiness to the various expressions of praise offered to Our Lady on the birth of her divine Son, to deepen our understanding of many prayers, beginning with that which says: “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, sinners”.

In the West, 1 January is an inaugural day marking the beginning of the civil year. The faithful are also involved in the celebrations for the beginning of the new year and exchange “new year” greetings. However, they should try to lend a Christian understanding to this custom making of these greetings an expression of popular piety. The faithful, naturally, realize that the “new year” is placed under the patronage of the Lord, and in exchanging new year greetings they implicitly and explicitly place the New Year under the Lord’s dominion, since to him belongs all time (cf. Rev. 1, 8; 22,13).

A connection between this consciousness and the popular custom of singing the *Veni Creator Spiritus* can easily be made so that on 1 January the faithful can pray that the Spirit may direct their thoughts and actions, and those of the community during the course of the year.

New year greetings also include an expression of hope for a peaceful New Year. This has profound biblical, Christological and incarnational origins. The “quality of peace” has always been invoked throughout history by all men, and especially during violent and destructive times of war.

Epiphany

National Migration Week - First [full] week of January

Since 1980, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has set aside the first [full] week of January each year as National Migration Week (NMW). The goal of NMW is to educate the native-born U.S. population about the similarities between them, immigrants in their community, and refugees around the world. The week provides an opportunity to reflect on the positive aspects and contributions of immigrants and refugees in this country.

For more information, visit www.usccb.org/mrs/nmw.shtml

The Proclamation of the the date of Easter on Epiphany

The *Proclamation of the Date of Easter on Epiphany* dates from a time when calendars were not readily available. It was necessary to make known the date of Easter in advance, since many celebrations of the liturgical year depend on its date. The number of Sundays that follow Epiphany, the date of Ash Wednesday, and the number of Sundays that follow Pentecost are all computed in relation to Easter. Although calendars now give the date of Easter and the other feasts

⁵ DPPL, no.117.

⁶ DPPL, nos. 115-117.

in the liturgical year for many years in advance, the Epiphany proclamation still has value. Its revival in many places would be opportune since it served to make the connection between the Epiphany and Easter, and orientate all feasts towards the greatest Christian solemnity.⁷

It is a reminder of the centrality of the resurrection of the Lord in the liturgical year and the importance of the great mysteries of faith which are celebrated each year. It is an option that can be worth reviving. The text is found in the *Sacramentary Supplement* published by Catholic Book Publishing.

From the ambo, after the gospel, the homily, or after prayer after communion, the deacon or, in his absence, another minister [cantor, reader] sings (chants) or speaks the proclamation.

Blessing homes with blessed chalk

The blessing of homes, on whose lintels are inscribed the Cross of salvation, together with the indication of the year and the initials of the three wise men (20+C+M+B+09), which can also be interpreted to mean *Christus mansionem benedicat*, written in blessed chalk; this custom, often accompanied by processions of children accompanied by their parents, expresses the blessing of Christ through the intercession of the three wise men and is an occasion for gathering offerings for charitable and missionary purposes.

Baptism of the Lord

Christmastide closes with the Baptism of the Lord. The feast presents an excellent opportunity for the faithful to be reminded of their rebirth as children of God in Baptism.⁸

Pastoral Note on the Sprinkling Rite:

The rite of sprinkling could be used at all Masses on this day, the Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling Holy Water in place of the Penitential Rite, and homilies could well concentrate on the symbols associated with Baptism.

The 2003 Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy document, *Introduction to the Order of Mass* says: "If the baptismal font is near the church doors, the greeting [of the Mass] & blessing [of water] may take place there. The priest may then sprinkle during the entrance procession. (#74)

Also, the 2007 U.S. Bishops' document *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* reminds us that, "When the liturgy calls for a *Gloria*, the singing of the *Gloria* is not to take place during the Sprinkling Rite." (#150).

You could sing a hymn during the entrance procession and use a simple repeated refrain during the Sprinkling Rite. For example, you could use the version of the antiphon, "Springs of Water" from the music provided for the Easter Vigil.

National Vocation Awareness Week - Second week of January

The National Coalition for Church Vocations (NCCV) sponsors and provides materials for three observances throughout the year: National Vocation Awareness Week, World Day for Consecrated Life, and World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Vocations Awareness week happens in the second week of January. In upcoming years the dates are: January 11-16, 2009; January 10-15, 2010.

For more information, visit www.nccv-vocations.org

⁷ DPPL, no. 118.

⁸ DPPL, no.119.

The End of the Christmas Season & decorations

The Baptism of the Lord is the end of the Christmas Season. Next Sunday should look different than the last weeks. Even though poinsettias are oftentimes hardy plants, their ongoing presence in the worship space just shouts “Christmas.” Consider offering the plants as return gifts to those who may have given them in memory of a loved one, to homebound parishioners, as gifts to local care facilities, senior housing centers, or other places where they will be appreciated.

Winter Ordinary Time

Ordinary Time begins on Monday after the Baptism of the Lord and continues until Tuesday before Ash Wednesday inclusive.⁹

Christian Unity Octave

World Week of Prayer for Christian Unity - January 18-25

The Week was originally begun in 1908 by the American Episcopalian clergyman Paul Wattson; who later became a Catholic and founded the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement in Graymoor, NY.

The Week begins on 18 January and ends on 25 January—the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul. Material for the Week of Prayer is prepared in collaboration by Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and The Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches.

The theme and text for each year’s observance of the Week of Prayer are chosen and prepared by representatives of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and representatives of the World Council of Churches. The international texts are developed, adapted and published for use in the USA by the Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute. For more information, visit www.atonementfriars.org/week_of_prayer.htm

Suggested ideas for a Mass during the Unity Octave

In 2009, the beginning and the end of the Octave for Christian Unity fall on Sundays, so no special readings may be used to begin or end this observance. However, the suggested psalm below, the readings in the Lectionary for Mass at 867–871, “For Christian Unity,” along with prayers from the *Sacramentary*, and hymns for unity might be used on appropriate weekdays during this week of special prayer.

Suggested Psalm for Christian Unity Ps 122

One of the “songs of ascent,” this psalm was prayed by pilgrims as they approach Jerusalem, going up the hill of the Temple Mount. Their prayer was for peace in this city that had known such division (and still does).

Con Qué Alegría/Let Us Go Rejoicing (Cortés)

I Rejoiced (Walker)

I Rejoiced When I Heard (Batastini/Gelineau)

I Rejoiced When I Heard Them Say (O’Carroll)

I Rejoiced When I Heard Them Say (Warner)

I Was Glad (Haas)

Let Us Go Rejoicing (Guimont)

Let Us Go Rejoicing (Hurd)

Let Us Go Rejoicing (Joncas)

Some suggested Christian Unity Songs

⁹ *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar*, [hereafter GNL] no. 44.

All Are Welcome (Haugen)
Anthem (Conry)
As a Fire Is Meant for Burning (Duck)
Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation
Diverse in Culture, Nation, Race (Duck)
Father, We Thank Thee Who Has Planted
For the Healing of the Nations (Kaan)
In Christ There Is No East or West
The Church's One Foundation
Ubi Caritas et Amor (Chant)
Ubi Caritas et Amor (Taizé)
We Are Many Parts (Haugen)
Where Charity and Love Prevail

National Day of Prayer and Penance for violations against Human Dignity-January 22 or 23

“In all the dioceses of the United States of America, January 22 (or January 23, when January 22 falls on a Sunday) shall be observed as a particular day of penance for violations to the dignity of the human person committed through acts of abortion, and of prayer for the full restoration of the legal guarantee of the right to life. The Mass “For Peace and Justice” (no. 22 of the “Masses for Various Needs”) should be celebrated with violet vestments as an appropriate liturgical observance for this day.”¹⁰

Suggestions for a Mass for Penance

Lectionary #887–891

Some suggested Lectionary texts:

Isaiah 32:15–18 (887-2). The prophet’s vision of a peaceful society is one built on right and justice.

Ps 72 (889-1)

In the reign of the ideal king, the lowly and the poor will find justice.

Every Nation on Earth (Joncas), Refrain II

Justice Shall Flourish (Cooney)

Justice Shall Flourish (Guimont)

Justice Shall Flourish (Schiavone)

Se Postrarán ante Ti/Every Nation upon Earth (Cortez), Respuesta II

or

Psalm 51

Philippians 4:6–9 (888-1). Paul offers a “household code”—a simple set of rules to live by. For the Christian, this code requires fidelity to truth, justice, beauty, and excellence.

Matthew 5:38–48 (891-2). This section of the Sermon on the Mount contains some of the most challenging moral prescriptions in the New Testament: Offer no resistance to one who is evil; pray for your persecutors. On this day, these texts point us toward practices that will make our penance effective and our defense of life successful.

Suggested Songs of Penitence

As a Fire Is Meant for Burning

Ashes

Change Our Hearts

Forgive Our Sins

Lead Me, Guide Me

Remember Your Love

¹⁰ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (USA edition)*, no. 373.

The Cry of the Poor
There's a Wideness in God's Mercy

January 25: Conversion of St. Paul

As a result of the Pauline Jubilee Year declared by Pope Benedict XVI to commemorate the bimillennium of the birth of St. Paul the Apostle, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments issued a decree on May 30, 2008 authorizing the use of the Mass formulary and Lectionary readings for the Conversion of Saint Paul for Mass on Sunday, January 25, 2009. The date on the Calendar remains the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time.

With regard to the Liturgy of the Word, the first reading proper to the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul (Acts 22:3-16 or Acts 9:1-22) is used. The Psalm can be of the Feast (Ps. 117) with the refrain, "Go out to all the world and tell the Good News;" or of the Third Sunday (Ps. 25) with the refrain, "Teach me your ways, O Lord". The second reading is taken from the Third Sunday (1 Cor 7:29-31). The Gospel is taken from the Feast (Mark 16:15-18). The Creed is said as is usual for Sundays.

The full text of the CDWDS decree can be found at: www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20080125_san-paolo_en.html

Catholic Schools Week

Catholic Schools Week - last week in January (January 25-31, 2009)

Catholic Schools Week (CSW) is a joint project of the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. (USCCB). Individual dioceses and local Catholic elementary and secondary schools develop and promote their own CSW activities each year. Catholic Schools Week celebration became an annual event in 1974. Catholic Schools Week celebrates education that goes beyond preparation for a secular life -- it is education that prepares students for a Christian life. CSW also celebrates the high standards of excellence and the quality of the education available to all students in Catholic elementary and secondary schools across the U.S.

For more information visit: www.ncea.org/news/CatholicSchoolsWeek.asp

February 2 - Presentation of the Lord

This feast celebrates the fortieth day after Christmas—in the Eastern Churches, it was celebrated on February 14, when it commemorated the fortieth day after Epiphany. That symbol of forty days is the reason for the feast's traditional importance and for its use as the time when candles are blessed for use in the churches (and in homes)—this was the 'Candle Mass' (Candlemas). In the middle ages, the feast became associated by farmers with predictions about the weather (if the sun shone on Candlemas and cast a shadow, then winter would continue; if it was cloudy and there was no shadow cast by the sun, then spring would come soon).

Blessing of Candles and Procession

The entrance rite today is quite similar to the entrance rite for Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion, except that on this feast members of the community carry candles instead of palms. The *Roman Missal* provides for a fully-formed procession, with the assembly and its ministers first gathering in a separate place before processing into the church. If the solemn entrance is used instead, the assembly gathers in the church as usual. The presider then greets the assembly and blesses the candles from the entrance of the church and then processes with the ministers to the altar, while all hold their lighted candles.

A song is sung at the very beginning of the liturgy, while the candles of the people are lit and while the ministers take their places either in a place apart from the church or at the church

entrance. The antiphon provided in the Missal expresses our faith that God brings “light to the eyes of those who serve him well.” Many of the song suggestions listed below would also be appropriate for use at this time.

The same or another song may be used to accompany the procession of the assembly and/or the ministers into the church. The *Roman Missal* uses an antiphon that speaks of “a light of revelation to the nations,” along with verses drawn from the Canticle of Simeon, which we hear proclaimed in today’s Gospel. Several settings of the canticle, along with some other appropriate songs for the procession, are listed below.

After the members of the assembly and the ministers have taken their places, the Mass continues with the singing of the *Gloria*.

World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life - February 2nd Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

In *Vita Consecrata*, the 1996 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Pope John Paul II wrote of the different forms of consecrated life as “the many branches which sink its roots into the Gospel and bring forth abundant fruit in every season of the Church’s life.” These diverse forms include: Monastic Life, the Orders of Virgins, Hermits, and Widows, Institutes completely devoted to contemplation, Apostolic Religious Life, Secular Institutes, Societies of Apostolic Life, and new or renewed forms of the consecrated life (cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 6-12).

Then in 1997 Pope John Paul II established the World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life, to be observed on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord (February 2). World Day for Prayer for Consecrated Life, “...is intended to help the entire Church to esteem ever more greatly the witness of those persons who have chosen to follow Christ by means of the practice of the evangelical counsels and, at the same time, is intended to be a suitable occasion for consecrated persons to renew their commitment and rekindle the fervor which should inspire their offering of themselves to the Lord.”

The late Holy Father wrote: “I trust that this World Day of prayer and reflection will help the *particular Churches* to treasure ever more the gift of consecrated life and to be measured by its message, to find the proper and fruitful balance between action and contemplation, between prayer and charity, and between commitment in the present time and eschatological hope.”

To read John Paul II’s first message for this day, visit www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_06011997_i-consecrated-life-day_en.html

The National Coalition for Church Vocations (NCCV) sponsors and provides materials for World Day for Consecrated Life. For more information, visit www.nccv-vocations.org