THE LITURGICAL YEAR

- The Church has established a way for the faithful to remember and celebrate the events of Christ's life on earth. By developing a special calendar, the Church gives us periodic reminders to keep our faith alive and inspire us to grow deeper in our love for Christ and our neighbour as we go through the year.

A Brief History and Explanation of the Liturgical Year

- Easter was the first annual feast celebrated by the early Christians and the only feast the Church celebrated for the first three hundred years.

- The feast of Christmas was first celebrated officially in the Church in 335-336 AD.

- Also remembered were those who heroically witnessed to their faith, especially the martyrs.

A Description of the Liturgical Calendar

- The liturgical calendar includes all Sundays and feasts of our Lord. Every Sunday is a renewed celebration of Christ's Resurrection from the dead; indeed, the Lord's Day (Sunday) is "a mini Easter."

- We honour the Lord on this holy day by prayerfully participating in the Mass, spending time with our families and avoiding unnecessary hard work and labour (see CCC 2186).

- There are also special days that honour the Queen of all Saints, Mary, Mother of God. Some of the Marian feast days include the feasts of Mary the Mother of God, the Annunciation, the Immaculate Conception, and the Assumption.

- There are three distinct levels for ranking the feast days in the Church.

- A **_solemnity_** is the liturgical celebration of the highest rank. Examples of solemnities include Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Christ the King, the Immaculate Conception of Mary, and the Solemnity of St. Joseph.

- A **_feast_** is also a liturgical celebration of great importance, but is of a lower rank than a solemnity. Special feasts include the feasts of the Holy Family, the Baptism of the Lord, the Transfiguration, and the Birth of Mary.

- The lowest rank of a feast day is a **_memorial._** Some examples of memorials are those of the Guardian Angels, saints such as St. Thomas Aquinas or St. Thérèse of Lisieux and many more.

THE LITURGICAL SEASONS

- **Advent:** Advent (4 weeks before Christmas) is the beginning of the liturgical year and lasts between three and four weeks. It is penitential in character inviting us to repent of our sins in preparation for Christmas. The Readings also focus on Christ's second coming at the end of time.
  The liturgical colour is **purple.**

- **Christmas:** During the Christmas season, we celebrate the birth of Christ our Saviour and the events of his early childhood.
  Liturgical Colour: **White.**

- **Lent:** Lent comprises the forty days before Easter. It is a time of preparation, of renewed repentance of our sins, and a new turning to God. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of fasting and abstinence (fasting means we make a significant sacrifice in the amount of food we eat; abstinence means we abstain from meat).
  The Liturgical colour is **Purple.**

- **Easter:** We celebrate the Resurrection of Christ from the Dead. By his Resurrection Christ has won for us Eternal Life. Forty days after Easter we celebrate his Ascension into Heaven. Ten days later we commemorate the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.
Liturgical Colour: **White (red for Pentecost).**

Ordinary Time:
There are thirty-four Sunday's and weeks of Ordinary Time, a few between the end of the Christmas season and Lent, and the remainder following Pentecost through the end of the liturgical.
Liturgical Colour: **Green.**

Holy Days of Obligation

- In addition to every Sunday, there are other days in which the faithful are obliged to go to Mass. These days are called *holy days of obligation.* In England and Wales, there are four holy days (listed in the order they occur in the liturgical year:

  - *December 25*: Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas Day)
  - *June 29*: Solemnity of Ss. Peter & Paul
  - *August 15*: Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
  - *November 1*: Solemnity of All Saints.

- **Certain Holy Days of Our Lord** are transferred to the Sunday. The Epiphany, Corpus Christi and the Ascension