
Cycle of Prayer

Introduction

In the Catholic tradition the human experience of time is used as a way of engaging us with the saving mystery of Christ's passion, death and resurrection. The cycle of days, weeks and the whole year is for this reason of supreme importance in Christian worship.

Each week on the day called the Lord's Day the Church commemorates the Lord's resurrection. Once a year at Easter the Church honours this resurrection and passion with the utmost solemnity. Through the yearly cycle the Church unfolds the entire mystery of Christ and keeps the anniversary of the saints. [GNLY 1]

All other celebrations need to find their proper place in the Calendar so that the principal mysteries of the redemption do not lose their appropriate prominence.

Amongst these other celebrations, from the earliest times have been the rogation and ember days, days of prayer for particular need or in thanksgiving for particular blessings of the Lord. Since 1972 the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has preferred to drop all distinction between ember and rogation days, and to speak simply of Days of special prayer.

In 1972 six such days were introduced but in the years which followed the number of such days increased to such an extent that they risked intruding on the celebration of the liturgical year, and especially on the celebration of the Lord's Day on Sundays. Subsequently the Bishops' Conference concluded that from Advent 1996 these Days of special prayer be subsumed into and replaced by a Cycle of Prayer.

The Cycle of Prayer seeks to preserve the integrity of the Sunday liturgy, without losing sight of the importance of being united with the universal or local Church in praying and working for important intentions. It seeks to do this by encouraging the faithful to pray for the intentions set out in the Cycle in their personal prayers throughout the period specified, and not only at Mass on a particular day.

The Cycle of Prayer is based on a division of the year into six periods, three of these being the principal liturgical seasons of Advent/Christmas; Lent and Easter and the other three periods being divisions of Ordinary Time, namely Winter, Summer and Autumn.

Each of these six periods is allocated its proper series of intentions for prayer, which may be taken up by both individuals and parishes and other groups throughout the season. Each individual intention also has its particular focal point, i.e. a particular celebration or Day of Prayer ordered by the Holy See.

How might a parish keep the Cycle of Prayer?

Outside of the Liturgy

- Intentions for the whole period might be listed in the parish newsletter or printed on a prayer card so as to help individual parishioners keep in mind and pray for the intentions for that period.
- Publicity and informational material might be displayed on parish noticeboards.
- Prayer-focuses may be placed in an appropriate place in the Church – following the example of the candle symbol popularised by Amnesty International.
- Parish meetings might be arranged so as to better inform parishioners about the particular objects of the intention (eg peace, Christian unity, the place and role of women in the

Church and the world, the sick, sea-farers, racial justice, prisoners and their families). This will also give the opportunity for parishioners to learn how they might become actively involved in working for the fulfilling of the intentions for which they pray.

- Retiring collections might be taken to support particular forms of pastoral activity.

Within the Liturgy — Mass

- On the Day of Special Prayer itself, and especially on Sundays, it is appropriate to announce the Day of Special Prayer in the opening remarks at the beginning of Mass, and for the special intention to be included in the Prayer of the Faithful (Bidding Prayers). Care should be taken that the remaining petitions of the Prayer of the Faithful should be formulated in accordance with the norms given in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal [69–71].
- When a Day of Prayer or other observance falls on a Sunday, the Mass and Lectionary texts of the Sunday are normally to be used.⁴
- On weekdays the use of suitable 'Masses for Various Needs and Occasions' or 'Votive Masses' should be considered to support the marking of the Day of Prayer. [GIRM 373–378] The readings assigned for each day in the Lectionary for weekdays should not be omitted too frequently and without sufficient reason. [GIRM 355c] It is often more fruitful to explore any special intentions through the readings assigned to the day, than to choose from the Common those which may appear at first sight more appropriate to the intention.
- The homily at Mass is necessary for the nurturing of the Christian life. It should develop some aspect of the readings from the scriptural readings or liturgical texts of the Mass, while taking into account the mystery being celebrated or the needs proper to the listeners. [GIRM 65] The homily should not be narrowly confined to the intention of the Cycle of Prayer alone, nor be replaced by a non-homiletic talk or an appeal for money.

Other Liturgies and Celebrations

- When it is desired to have a form of extended prayer for one of the intentions in the Cycle of Prayer, serious consideration should be given to holding a special non-eucharistic service for that purpose, such as a Vigil, the Evening Prayer of the Church, a Liturgy of the Word, or a procession with litanies.
- Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, 'which must clearly express the cult of the Blessed Sacrament in its relationship to the Mass', [HCWE 82] should also be considered. It should be noted that there is specific provision within this rite for special prayers.

When considering how particular intentions are to be presented and marked within a parish, every effort should be made to extend the invitation to participate in this to all members of the parish, including the younger members of the parish, and the housebound.

¹ In accordance with the Ceremonial of Bishops 229, on Sundays in Ordinary Time one of the readings may be chosen from the Lectionary for Mass that serves to highlight the special intention for which prayers are being offered. But preference should normally be given to the lectionary readings assigned to the Sunday.

On world Mission Day [the penultimate Sunday in October] one Mass 'For the Spread of the Gospel' is authorised by Roman Missal (1975), p.815. In England and Wales, one Mass for the Dead may be celebrated on Remembrance Day