

# CHRIST THE KING

## OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST KING OF THE UNIVERSE

The Feast of *Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe* is celebrated on the last Sunday of Ordinary Time, before the beginning of Advent that starts the new Church Year. As the last Sunday of the year, Christ the King Sunday is the conclusion of the Church's liturgical journey through the life of Christ and the gospel message. Its purpose is to celebrate the coming reign of Christ as ruler of the renewed creation that will characterize the fullness of the Kingdom of God. That hope is born from the entire life of Christ and his teachings that we have been celebrating during the past twelve months.

The first Sunday of Advent follows Christ the King Sunday and consequently, a new cycle of Sunday Mass readings, drawn from a different Gospel, begins the new cycle of the Church Year.

### History

The Solemnity of Christ the King is a newer feast in the Catholic Church that was instituted by Pope Pius XI in his encyclical *Quas Primas* in 1925.

At the time, secularism was on the rise with the establishment of non-Christian dictatorships in Europe and many Christians began to doubt Christ's existence and authority. In response, Pius XI established the feast with the intent to reaffirm and refocus faith and respect for the kingship of Jesus and as the ruler over both creation and history.

### Christ as King

Christians have long celebrated Jesus as Christ, and various aspects of his reign are celebrated in Advent (when Christians wait for his second coming in glory), Christmas (when his star reveals him to be "King of the Jews"), Holy Week (when he is the crucified king), Easter (when he is resurrected in power and glory), and the Ascension (when he returns to the glory he had with the Father before the world was created).

Originally, the feast was celebrated on the final Sunday of October, prior to All Saints Day.

In 1969, to emphasize its importance, Pope Paul VI moved the feast to the last Sunday before Advent. So now the old liturgical year ends by celebrating Christ's kingship and the new year begins with Advent, when we await the coming of Christ to rule our hearts and lives.



## SEASONS OF THE LITURGICAL YEAR

**Advent** begins the liturgical year on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. A season of hope as well as penance, Advent features the writings of the Old Testament prophets in its Mass readings.

**Christmas** begins with Christmas Day, goes through Epiphany and concludes with the Baptism of the Lord. As a celebration of the Incarnation, the Christmas season also highlights the manifestation of Christ's divinity to the world.

**Lent** is a 40 day preparation for Easter that focuses on fasting, prayer and almsgiving. Lent is a time to reflect on how well we are living out our baptism.

**The Paschal or Easter Triduum** (from the Latin, three days) begins with the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper and continues until Easter evening.

The **Easter Season** extends from Easter Sunday through Pentecost Sunday. During this time, the Church reflects on the mystery of our redemption through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus.

**Ordinary Time** is the only liturgical season that comes in two sections. The first begins with the Baptism of the Lord and goes until Ash Wednesday. The second follows Pentecost and concludes with the Feast of Christ the King.



## LITURGICAL COLORS

Through the Church Year, the vestments worn by the priest at Mass signifies meaning associated with the various seasons of the liturgical calendar.

**White**, the color of joy and victory, is used for the seasons of Easter and Christmas and select feasts through the year. Select saints who are not martyrs are also celebrated with white. In addition, white is also a reminder of the resurrection and can therefore be used at funerals.

**Red**, the color of fire and blood is used on the days when we celebrate the passion of Jesus, Passion (Palm) Sunday and Good Friday. It is also used for the birth feasts of the apostles and evangelists and for the celebrations of martyrs.

**Green**, symbolizes life, anticipation, and hope and is used during Ordinary Time.

**Violet or purple**, seen in Advent, helps us to remember that we are preparing for the coming of Christ. Lent, the season of penance, repentance, and renewal, also uses this color.

**Rose** is an optional color and may be used on the Third Sunday of Advent, *Gaudete Sunday*, and on the Fourth Sunday of Lent, *Laetare Sunday*. It expresses the joy of anticipation for Christmas and Easter.

## THE LECTIONARY AND THE LITURGICAL YEAR

In the Church Year, beginning with the First Sunday of Advent and concluding with the Solemnity of Christ the King, the Church celebrates and lives out the mystery of Christ. The history of salvation unfolds throughout this liturgical cycle.

The liturgical cycle divides the year into a series of seasons, each with its own mood and theological emphasis, which is expressed by different ways of decorating the church, the colors of the priest's vestments (see below, left) and the scripture readings chosen for each day found in the Lectionary for Mass.

Before Vatican II, the selection of readings for the lectionary consisted of a one year cycle of two readings, one from a New Testament letter and one from one of the Gospels.

Vatican II wanted Catholics to become more familiar with Scripture and so changed the Sunday Mass readings to the present three-year cycle (A, B or C) with three readings (plus the Psalm) at each Mass. This resulted in Catholics hearing much more of the Old Testament, and hearing the majority of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. The Gospel of John is read during the Easter season and in the other seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Lent where appropriate.

In addition, the Catholic lectionary also includes a two-year cycle for the weekday Mass readings (Cycle I and Cycle II). These readings are generally shorter than those chosen for use on Sundays, and the Gospels are arranged so that portions of all four are read every year.