

Question: What is Ordinary Time?

Answer: Ordinary Time in the context of the liturgical calendar is not to be understood as something that is average and in essence “ordinary.” Instead, the Church understands Ordinary Time as a period in the liturgical year that is not a part of the Lent-Easter season or the Advent-Christmas season. Unlike the Easter and Christmas seasons that focus on one specific aspect of Jesus’ life like the Passion or his birth, Ordinary Time focuses on the many aspects and events of Jesus’ life. It is the period of the liturgical year that focuses on how to live our daily lives as Christians in relation to Jesus’ life, and ultimately is devoted to the mystery of Christ in all his aspects. (*The Liturgy Documents*, 177) There are either thirty-three or thirty-four weeks of Ordinary Time throughout the liturgical year.

There are two parts to the period of Ordinary Time each year. The first began for us last weekend when the Christmas season ended with the Baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan River. We will continue with Ordinary Time until the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday (February 5) when Lent begins. After the Easter season and Pentecost Sunday is over, we will once again continue in Ordinary Time beginning the Monday after Pentecost, May 12, 2008. The period of Ordinary Time always comes to an end with the celebration of the Most Holy Trinity or the Feast of Christ the King, celebrated this year on Sunday, November 23, always the weekend before the start of Advent.

Each new liturgical year starts on the first Sunday of Advent. Not only is it a new year according to the Church, but our readings change as well. There are three sets of readings that correspond directly to the liturgical year we are in. From December 1, 2007, through November 29, 2008 we will be in year A. The gospel readings in year A are primarily taken from the gospel of Matthew. The readings for year B are primarily taken from Mark, and readings for year C, the liturgical year we just completed, are primarily taken from Luke. Since the gospel of John is not devoted to a year like the three synoptic gospels, readings from John’s gospel find their way into Mass throughout the year. John’s gospel is also the primary focus during the Lenten and Easter seasons.

Certain colors identify seasons within the liturgical year as well. The intent of different colors during the liturgical year is to express outwardly the mysteries of our faith celebrated each weekend. In addition, the change of colors walk us through the annual rite of Christian passage. (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*) Priestly vestments will correspond with the season we are in. That means that Fr. Dave will wear the color of the season. During Ordinary Time, the liturgical color is green, the sign of hope. There are colors for other seasons of the year as well. White symbolizes purity, innocence, rejoicing, and light. It is worn during periods of Christmas and Easter. White is also worn on feast days of the Lord other than his Passion, and on feast days of saints who were not martyred. The color red is symbolic of blood and fire. It is also representative of the Holy Spirit and worn during the week of Pentecost and on Palm Sunday of the Lord’s Passion. Red is also worn for feast days of Martyrs, Evangelists, and Apostles. Violet is the color of sorrow and penance. It is worn during Lent and Advent. It can also be worn during Masses for the Dead. White or black vestments may also be worn during funeral services. On solemn days, sacred vestments may be worn that are more festive and precious than normal, even if they are not the color of the day. Gold and silver vestments may be worn on solemn occasions in the diocese of the United States of America. (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*)

Oftentimes a priest will also have a symbol on his vestment. The symbol that might be worn on a given Sunday could be a simple cross, the Alpha and Omega, or the Chi Rho. The Chi Rho are Greek letters that represent Christ. They are the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ, *Christos*, or in Greek Χριστός. The symbol became extremely popular after the Emperor Constantine saw it in a vision before the Battle at the Milvian Bridge in 312.