

Time of Our Life

Introduction

This resource has been produced as a result of the positive response to “Mass in a Moment.” It consists of 33 brief texts concerning the Sundays and feasts of the liturgical year, including six that deal with rites of adult initiation celebrated at Sunday Mass. Their intent is to provide liturgical education for parishioners, but as has been true of “Mass in a Moment,” the texts are useful in many other contexts. Margaret Bick, former editor of the *National Bulletin on Liturgy*, composed these texts at the request of the Ontario Liturgical Conference, a consultative body to the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Each segment is no more than 140 words and focuses on a single season, feast or rite. Each is intended to capture attention quickly and to highlight the theological dimensions of the celebration. Because of the brevity imposed there is no intention to be complete, but to bring to light the foundations of the liturgical year:

the primacy of the Paschal Mystery at every moment of the liturgical year;
the on-going presence of the kingdom of God in our midst,
the duality of the Church’s calendar of feasts operating parallel to one another with often quizzical results:

- Sundays and solemnities
- the sanctoral cycle;

the on-going presence of the kingdom of God in our midst, and
the eschatological nature of the liturgy and of Christian life.

Dedication

This resource is dedicated to the Canadian Bishops, living and deceased, who participated in the Second Vatican, in honour of their commitment to the work of the renewal of the Church and the promotion of the liturgy among the people of God.

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The Time of Our Life

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Advent

The four Sundays of Advent call us out of the usual and routine
to a deeper, more heightened awareness of our place in time.

Isaiah the prophet, John the baptist, Mary the pregnant virgin, and Jesus, God-with-us,
lived in contrast to their time;
they stuck out like sore thumbs;
they were lights shining in the darkness
and they directed the world's attention to a time and a reality beyond their own,
to the God of Promise, come as one of us,
to the ultimate reign of God.

Their witness challenges us to take a look at the world, while standing on our head, to see:
flattened mountains,
wolves with lambs lying down together,
blind people who in fact see,
ploughshares made from swords,
nations dancing together,
a child born of a virgin,
a shepherd who is also king
and a kingdom of righteous tax collectors and prostitutes.

The kingdom of God is already among us!

Christmas

If our Advent has been fruitful
 we gather throughout the Christmas season
 to celebrate a God who, in a desperate, irrevocable act of love,
 has stooped to become a human being.

After Advent's reminder that our destiny is the New Jerusalem,
Christmas brings us to a stable in Bethlehem.

This God does not cling to the safety of heaven:
 this God takes shelter in the womb of young girl and sleeps in an animal's feed box.

If our Advent has been fruitful,
we will see in our celebrations throughout the Christmas season
 that the baby in the manger is the man who died horribly that we might live forever;
we will see that shepherds and magi-kings come
 to honour the babe who is both shepherd and king.

The Word-made-flesh dwells among us;
we have seen his glory.

Mary, Mother of God

In the fullness of time, scripture says, the Word of God became human:
earth was forever joined to heaven.

The child of Bethlehem is the son of Mary and the son of God.
An angel names him: Jesus, “God saves.”

There is much naming today.

Mary is the mother of God.

We are no longer slaves. God’s name is upon us; we are God’s people.

The Spirit within us cries out, “Father! Father!” We are God’s children.

Because we are children, we are heirs –
heirs to the treasure of salvation.

Mary is presented as a treasure chest.

She bore within her womb the living Word of God, the bringer of God’s salvation.

She ponders in her heart words spoken of him.

God has been gracious to us.

God has given us peace beyond understanding.

Truly God has blessed us.

Epiphany

Today's feast celebrates a God who is great at keeping promises,
but refuses to keep secrets.

A thing or event in which a god is revealed is called an epiphany.
Our bible tells epiphany stories,
it is the great story of God's quest to be known by the whole world.
God is constantly trying to break through to us,
to overcome our limitations
so that everyone can know God.

Those who recognize God in the events of their lives can be called wise,
like gift-bearing men in the gospel.

These wise men have read the signs well.
With their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh,
they recognize the child as a king,
over whose life the shadow of death is looming.

Those who read God's signs and understand
are sent to be epiphanies for all the nations and peoples of the world.
Perhaps this is the only real gift we have to give.

Baptism of the Lord

The baptism of Jesus is another epiphany event.
That's why it is celebrated within the Christmas season.

In the Jordan scene Jesus' true identity is announced:
he is the beloved, Spirit-filled Son of God.

This is a major turning point for Jesus;
his ministry in the world is about to begin.
Passing through the waters of the Jordan River,
Jesus accepts his mission.

Jesus is a living epiphany.
The child of Bethlehem, now grown up,
takes on the saving work of
feeding the hungry,
bringing justice and light to the nations,
opening the eyes of the blind,
freeing prisoners,
comforting the afflicted,

He will draw the world back to God,
accomplishing God's purpose.

From the waters of the Jordan,
Jesus will journey to the desert to make his final preparations
in prayer and fasting.

Winter Ordinary Time

Jesus came to establish the kingdom of God in our midst.

By his resurrection “on the first day of the week”
Christ established Sunday as “the Lord’s Day.”

Every Sunday recalls Christ’s death, resurrection and exaltation at God’s right hand.
Every Sunday is a sign of the presence of the kingdom of God among us.

“Ordinary” Time?

The daily unfolding of the kingdom of God is far from “ordinary.”
In naming this time as “Ordinary,” the Church simply means it is “ordered” or “numbered” time.

Ordinary Time is elastic, stretching and shrinking as the calendar requires.
Before Ash Wednesday,
there can be as few as three “Ordinary” Sundays, or as many as eight.

Ordinary Time proclaims the ongoing presence of the kingdom of God,
by offering us sequential pieces of one of the Gospels—
Matthew, Mark or Luke—
as a lens through which to detect the kingdom in our midst.

Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday calls the Church into retreat,
to stop in our tracks and consider a new direction.
“See, now is the acceptable time;
see, now is the day of salvation!”

But the Church is not famous for sudden, dramatic change.
Our journey is accomplished step-by-step,
each one preceded by a period of transition,
a hinge of time.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of such a hinge time,
a brief pre-Lenten time of four days,
in which we re-orient ourselves for our deeper Lenten observance.

Today’s ashes proclaim and make visible the human side of the Church;
we are a community of redeemed sinners.

When we come forward to be marked with ashes
we do not know what Lent will hold for us;
we simply answer the call.

“Lord, we do not know where you are going,” we confess.
“How can we know the way?” we ask.

Lent

The Church's great annual six-week retreat
is a time of preparation for both the baptized and those preparing for baptism (the "elect").

After this six-week period
of purification –

nourished and deepened by prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and rites of scrutiny –
and of enlightenment –

prompted by proclamation of and reflection on the Sunday gospels –
the Church will lead the elect to the font

where, at the climax of our solemn three-day celebration of Easter,
they will make passage with Christ through death to new life in him.

By our Lenten observance,
we strive to let go of "self-ish" ness
and "put on the mind of Christ."

We do this individually,
but also as a community,
the whole Church, as one body, seeking renewal.

We aim not just to do different things for forty days,
but to be permanently different when they are over.

Passion (Palm) Sunday

A crowd has gathered at the door.
Why don't they go in and find their usual seat?
What are these branches they hold and bless?

With these branches we conduct the overture
that sounds the themes of the Triduum symphony
whose opening notes we await with great anticipation.

With these branches we proclaim Christ our messiah and king.

We are not the fickle crowd
shouting "Hosanna" one day and "Crucify him!" the next.

We are those who were once silent stones,
who now cry out with joy to God
in whose name Christ comes.

We, who have taken on the mind of Christ,
enter Jerusalem with him,
ready to enter again into his paschal journey.

"Christ became obedient for us even to death, dying on the cross.
Therefore God raised him on high and gave him a name above all other names."

Mass of Chrism

We stand now on the doorstep of the great paschal Triduum.
One task remains before the festival begins:
the blessing of the sacred oils.

Three oils are blessed:
the oil of the catechumens,
the oil of the sick, and
sacred chrism.

Chrism is the oil of all the baptized.
Infants are anointed with chrism at their baptism
and we are all anointed with chrism at confirmation.

For us,
who have been born again in the waters of baptism
made temples of God's glory radiant with the goodness of life
and clothed with incorruption—
chrism is a sign of life and salvation.

By our anointing with chrism
God transforms us into the likeness of Christ,
and gives us a share in his royal, priestly, and prophetic honour and work,
so even the altar and church walls are anointed with chrism.

Triduum

Most of our modern North American feasts are twenty-four hour affairs:

New Year's Day, Canada Day, Labour Day, Thanksgiving Day.

But the Christian Easter Triduum is different:

it's a three-day affair.

During the Triduum

we "pull out all the stops" to proclaim, celebrate and manifest
the victory of Jesus, the Christ, over evil and death.

Some of this is done in our at-home atmosphere of retreat,

but for key moments we come together

as Church, household of God, body of the risen Christ.

We celebrate over three days with:

fasting and feasting,

solemnity and jubilation,

saying and doing,

stories and songs,

with water, towels and dirty feet,

the wood of the cross,

the light of Christ,

the water of the font,

the oil of gladness and salvation, and

bread and wine, body and blood,

blessed, broken and shared.

Easter Season

The Easter season is the Church's great fifty-day festival
for exploring the mystery of our salvation in Christ.

The stories we hear during the first weeks of the season
may lull us into asking this Easter season to walk us through early Church history.

But the season holds far greater riches!

This great mystery of salvation is like a flower
whose beauty and fragrance, hidden in the bud,
is opened to us week by week,
revealing the wonder of our own lives:
the meaning of Christ's resurrection,
the mystery of our salvation through participation in Christ's passage,
Christ's revelation of his presence in the life of the Church,
the nature of the Church as Spirit-filled community of disciples,
the mission of the Church in the world,
and the glory whose fullness we await.

Ascension

Today's stories sound like good-bye stories.
A few final words, then Jesus departs.

But like all mystery stories, things are not as they appear.

These good-bye stories are more about staying than leaving – staying in a new way.
“I am with you always,” Jesus promises.

The gospels of the previous Sundays have made it clear
that Jesus intends to keep the promise.

With the Holy Spirit to guide,
we will find him with the eyes, ears, mind and heart of faith.

The kingdom of God is among us.
God has raised Jesus and enthroned him as Lord of the universe.

But this is not a lordship of tyranny, oppression or slavery.
Christ is the Lord of life and of love.

We are anointed to be his body in the world,
until he returns in glory for the world's final transformation.

Pentecost

On the evening of the day he rose from the dead, says the gospel of John,
Christ breathed the Holy Spirit into his terrified disciples.
A peace surpassing all understanding took hold among them.

Later as they gathered all in one place,
as had become their custom,
the believers experienced the Spirit's coming
in power and in signs of wonder.

The reign of God has taken a giant step toward completion:
Babel is torn asunder.
The languages of human division and alienation
are replaced by the tongues of the Spirit.

There is one body and one Spirit,
one Lord, one faith, one baptism
one God and Father of us all.

The nations cry out, "Abba! Father!"
The nations cry out, "Jesus is Lord."

Though we do not know the hour of the final restoration,
we live to witness to the truth of its coming.

Trinity Sunday

Most Sunday feasts celebrate an event in Jesus' life.
Today's feast celebrates what Jesus' whole life revealed.

It took a pregnant virgin,
 an infant in a stable,
 a man of signs and wonders,
 a horrible death,
 a wondrous resurrection and glorious ascension,
 a mighty wind and more signs and wonders,
for God to get through to us what God is really about.

Our God is Father, Son and Spirit.
God intends to remain active in and among us.

We, the household of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Spirit,
 gather on Sunday
 to be united ever more deeply with one another and with Christ
 by the power of the Holy Spirit
 in praise of the God of mercy, faithfulness and abundant love.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
 the love of God
 and the communion of the Holy Spirit
 be with us.

The Body and Blood of Christ

During the Easter season,

the gospel passages told of Jesus' promise to remain:

we will experience his love and peace in the embrace of the community of believers;

we will hear his shepherding voice speaking among us;

we will recognize him in the breaking of the bread.

Today's feast celebrates his sacramental presence among us

until he comes in glory.

By Christ's presence in the eucharist

God feeds us,

nourishing within us the seed of eternal life won by the outpouring of Christ's blood

and strengthening us to carry on Christ's work in the world.

Today is a fitting occasion to rejoice

in our sharing in the bread of life and the cup of salvation.

Truly, when we eat this bread and drink this cup,

we proclaim the death of the Lord,

until he comes.

Summer/Fall Ordinary Time

Near the beginning of June
the Church resumes Ordinary Time.

There can be as few as 22 or as many as 25 Sundays
following the Easter Season
and the Solemnities of the Holy Trinity and the Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi).

While the winter portion of Ordinary Time generally ends with the call of the Twelve,
this summer/fall portion generally picks up with the sending of the disciples into mission.

By mid-November the gospel passages begin to point to the end-times.

We are challenged to see the whole of Christian life as
life in the end-times,
life under the reign of God,
lived in the lifestyle of the kingdom outlined for us by Isaiah way back in Advent.

Ordinary Time closes with the Solemnity of Christ the King,
the shepherd king,
the suffering- servant king.

What a fitting prelude to Advent!

Christ the King

It seems odd for people living in twenty-first century democracies
to celebrate a king.
Some people do try to avoid using royal language to talk about God.

The truth is: human language is inadequate for talking about God.
It can never tell everything about God,
and it may not be totally accurate,
but human language can speak truth about God.

Today's feast celebrates Jesus as the shepherd-king,
descendent of David who was first shepherd, then king
and legendary author of the beautiful shepherd psalm.

We celebrate a king whose priorities are not those of this world:
feeding the hungry,
satisfying the thirsty,
welcoming the stranger,
clothing the naked, and
visiting the sick and imprisoned.

We celebrate a king who brings forgiveness and reconciliation
through the shedding of his own blood.

Surely there is room for such a king in any age!

Presentation of the Lord – February 2

We are all very familiar with the liturgical year and the flow of the seasons:

Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time.

But we have also inherited a calendar of anniversary feasts and other celebrations
that runs in parallel with the liturgical year.

These are feasts and celebrations that have come to be associated with a specific date.

Often these associations were born of a pious attempt, in days long past,
to calculate the dates on which certain events must have occurred.

These celebrations are never *moved to* Sunday but when they *naturally* occur on a Sunday
they replace the numbered Sunday.

The Presentation of the Lord is such a celebration.

When Mary and Joseph bring their infant to the temple,
as required by ancient Jewish law,
he is recognized within the temple as the Light of the World.

Candles are blessed on this day in recognition of this title of Christ.

Birth of John the Baptist – June 24

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they replace the numbered Sunday.

The Birth of John the Baptist is such a celebration.

Zechariah asked for proof

when an angel told him that

he and his elderly wife Elizabeth would be parents to a great prophet.

As a result, he became mute until this moment we hear about today.

His first words proclaimed God's praise.

Sts. Peter and Paul – June 29

We are all very familiar with the liturgical year and the flow of the seasons:

Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time.

But we have also inherited a calendar of feasts of saints
that runs in parallel with the liturgical year.

On these days the Church gives thanks to God for the life and work of those who have gone before us,
usually on the day of their earthly death, their date of birth into eternal, heavenly life.

Each local community celebrates its local heroes.

When a saint is canonized an appropriate date is assigned for this to happen.

Some heroes are so important that the whole Church honours their feast day.

Peter and Paul each have their own separate feasts but are celebrated together today
as the forefathers of the Roman Church.

Transfiguration of the Lord – August 6

We are all very familiar with the liturgical year and the flow of the seasons:

Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time.

But we have also inherited a calendar of anniversary feasts and other celebrations
that runs in parallel with the liturgical year.

These are feasts and celebrations that have come to be associated with a specific date.

Often these associations were born of a pious attempt, in days long past,
to calculate the dates on which certain events must have occurred.

These celebrations are never *moved to* Sunday but when they *naturally* occur on a Sunday
they replace the numbered Sunday.

The Transfiguration of the Lord is such a celebration.

High up on a mountain,

Jesus reveals the truth of his identity to Peter, James and John.

It is no coincidence that Moses and Elijah are present to validate this revelation.

They both experienced manifestations of God on mountains made holy by God's presence.

Truly, this is God's beloved Son. Let us listen to him!

Assumption of Mary – August 15

We are all very familiar with the liturgical year and the flow of the seasons:
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to calculate the dates on which certain events must have occurred.

These celebrations are never *moved to* Sunday but when they *naturally* occur on a Sunday
they replace the numbered Sunday.

The Assumption of Mary is such a celebration.

Today's gospel sets Mary before us as model of the Church at prayer.

Indeed, the Canticle of Mary is proclaimed daily
around the world
in the Church's evening prayer.

Surely Mary's canticle is the anthem of the whole Church.

Blessed is she; blessed are we.

Triumph of the Cross – September 14

We are all very familiar with the liturgical year and the flow of the seasons:

Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time.

But we have also inherited a calendar of anniversary feasts and other celebrations
that runs in parallel with the liturgical year.

These are feasts and celebrations that have come to be associated with a specific date.

Often these associations were born of a pious attempt, in days long past,
to calculate the dates on which certain events must have occurred.

These celebrations are never *moved to* Sunday but when they *naturally* occur on a Sunday
they replace the numbered Sunday.

The Triumph of the Cross is such a celebration,
marking the finding of a relic of the true cross in the fourth century.

Throughout history this feast has been celebrated
on various dates with various names.

But the triumph of Christ over sin and death
on behalf of all humanity
has always been at its heart.

All Saints – November 1

We are all very familiar with the liturgical year and the flow of the seasons:

Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time.

But we have also inherited a calendar of feasts of saints
that runs in parallel with the liturgical year.

On these days the Church gives thanks to God for the life and work of those who have gone before us
usually on the day of their earthly death, their date of birth into eternal, heavenly life.

Each local community celebrates its local heroes.

When a saint is canonized an appropriate date is assigned for this to happen.

Some heroes are so important that the whole Church honours their feast day.

On the Solemnity of All Saints we give thanks to God for the entire communion of saints
who have been models for our living in the world
and whose work has built up the Church.

All Souls – November 2

We are all very familiar with the liturgical year and the flow of the seasons:

Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time.

But we have also inherited a calendar of feasts of saints

that runs in parallel with the liturgical year.

On these days the Church gives thanks to God for the life and work of those who have gone before us
usually on the day of their earthly death, their date of birth into eternal, heavenly life.

Today we pray for those who have died

and celebrate the mercy of God

made manifest in the lives of all the faithful departed.

Dedication of Saint John Lateran – November 9

We are all very familiar with the liturgical year and the flow of the seasons:

Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time.

But we have also inherited a calendar of anniversary feasts and other celebrations that runs in parallel with the liturgical year.

These are feasts and celebrations that have come to be associated with a specific date.

Often these associations were born of a pious attempt, in days long past, to calculate the dates on which certain events must have occurred.

These celebrations are never *moved to* Sunday but when they *naturally* occur on a Sunday they replace the numbered Sunday.

The Dedication of Saint John Lateran is such a celebration.

On the face of it, the feast commemorates the anniversary of the dedication of one Roman basilica.

However, it serves two other purposes:

- It celebrates the Church in flesh and blood whose glory is reflected in the church of brick and mortar.
- It serves as the dedication anniversary of any church whose dedication date is unknown.

Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

Baptism is about a way of life.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Christianity is called “the Way.”

In the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens
the Church invites unbaptized people to experience our way of life
for an extended period of time
as a form of apprenticeship for life as a Christian.

Those who are welcomed in this rite have heard the call of the Gospel of Jesus Christ;
they look to the Church for support in responding.

During this rite they are marked with the cross of Christ.
From this time on the Church embraces them as its own with a mother’s love and concern.

They are now part of the household of the Church, the household of Christ.
They will be nourished at the table of the word
and sustained by means of various liturgical rites.

Dismissing Catechumens

Why are we sending them out?

For our part:

Although catechumens are part of the *household* of Christ,
they are not part of the *body* of Christ.

What we do after they leave, we do in union with Christ, as members of his body.
The general intercessions are prayed by the whole Christ, Head and members
The eucharist is celebrated by the whole Christ, Head and members.

For their part:

They have been fed with the word of God.
They go now to digest it
and to develop skills for digesting it on their own
once their apprenticeship is over.

Nourished by the word of God
they are strengthened for turning their lives toward God
through the life of prayer,
by joining in the activities of the parish
and by assisting in the Church's outreach.

Rite of Election or Enrolment of Names

Are they ready, yet?!

Are our catechumens ready to be called to the sacraments?

Let's listen to the testimony of their sponsors and catechists:

they now listen and celebrate the word with us every Sunday;

they have developed habits of prayer;

they join in the activities of the parish;

they have assisted in the parish's outreach in the community; and

they believe what we believe.

We think they are ready.

Are they sure they want to enter fully into the life of the Church,

to become part of the body of Christ,

to enter into his arduous passage to new life

and all that it leads to?

In fear and trembling, they say that they are sure.

In light of the testimony of those who have walked most closely with them,

the Church accepts them as elected by God.

With a little Lenten polishing they will be ready for the font.

The Scrutinies

When we celebrate the scrutinies
 with those who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil,
we make public the process that should be going on inside each one present
 as we prepare to renew in ourselves again this year
 the baptismal promises these “elect” will be making for the first time.

Our elect have done much soul-searching
 in the days leading up to these rites.

In the light of the Sunday gospels,
 weakness, defects and sin are uncovered and
 strengths, righteousness, goodness are built up.

We all—baptized and elect alike—come to these rites in humility
 acknowledging need and giving thanks for God’s gifts.

Together we allow the gospel of Christ
 to sharpen our perception of sin,
 our dependence on God’s mercy,
 and our desire for life in God.

Rite of Welcoming of Candidates for Confirmation and Eucharist

We become full members of the Catholic Church through three sacraments of initiation:
baptism, confirmation and eucharist.

Those baptized as infants are admitted to the other two sacraments
only when they can benefit from a process of preparatory formation.

The Rite of Welcoming of Candidates for Confirmation and Eucharist
can be celebrated with children and adults when this formation process begins.

Those who are welcomed in this rite have already been baptized.
Baptized Catholics need to complete the sequence of initiation sacraments.
Those who were not baptized in a Catholic community
will be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church
on their way to confirmation and sharing at our eucharistic table.

During this rite candidates are marked with the cross of Christ
as a reminder of their baptism and their sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ.
The Catholic community promises to support them through this process.

Rite of Calling Candidates to Lenten Renewal

Are they ready, yet?!

Are our baptized adults ready for confirmation and eucharist?

Let's listen to the testimony of their sponsors and catechists:

they participate in our parish Sunday liturgy;

prayer is a regular part of their lives;

they join in the activities of the parish;

they have assisted in the parish's outreach in the community; and

they believe what we believe.

We think they are ready.

They are ready to join the community in its Lenten renewal.

Lent will prepare the whole community to renew baptismal promises.

By prayer, fasting and works of charity

we and the candidates will unite ourselves more deeply to Christ.

Their Lenten observance will further deepen the candidates' appreciation
of the life centred on the table of the eucharist.