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Keeping Saints' DaysMichael Monshau, OP*Formation for Christian LifeThe ancient custom of observing an annual saint's day (or feast day), is so ancient that before the Church claimed 25 December for Christmas, it was already the feast day of Saint Anastasia! The observance of saints' days is important for us and the various ways we celebrate them are also important. On 19 March, the universal Church is moved to great devotion as she lovingly observes the feast of her patron, Saint Joseph, with various traditions. Lent notwithstanding, he never goes unremembered on his respective feast day. Also in March we remember Saints Patrick, Clement Hofbauer, Louise de Marillac, Stephen Harding, Casimir, Kieran, Katherine Drexel and Cyril of Jerusalem, to cite only several.On a saint's day, we might well reflect upon the meaning of the observance of the saints' feast days for us today. Why do we remember them? Why do we keep an annual feast day for each of them? What does that accomplish? Should we maintain such customs in our families, parishes, religious houses and dioceses? If so, why?We believe the saints accompany us. The Catechism reminds us that in our profession of faith we say "I believe... in the communion of saints". In Pope John Paul II's 1989 Apostolic Exhortation, Redemptoris Custos, with reference to Saint Joseph, he elaborated on that article: "I am convinced that by reflection upon the way that Mary's spouse shared in the divine mystery, the Church — on the road towards the future with all of humanity — will be enabled to discover ever anew her own identity within this redemptive plan, which is founded on the mystery of the Incarnation" (Introduction).Pope Benedict XVI often recalls the value the saints have for us today. He has taught extensively in the past year about the great saints of the 13th century friar movement. At the conclusion of his audience on 13 January of last year, the Pope spoke about the 13th century mendicant movement itself, and his Holiness prayed "[M]ay [the Holy Spirit] ... make each one aware of the urgent need to offer a consistent and courageous Gospel witness so that there may always be saints who make the Church resplendent, like a bride, ever pure and beautiful, without spot or wrinkle, who can attract the world irresistibly to Christ and to his salvation".In subsequent general audiences, Pope Benedict's addresses included instruction on Saints Francis of Assisi, Dominic, Anthony de Padua and Bonaventure. Last year on 3 February, at the conclusion of his remarks, His Holiness recalled Saint Dominic with these words: "May the life of Dominic de Guzman spur us all to be fervent in prayer, courageous in living out our faith and deeply in love with Jesus Christ. Through his intercession, let us ask God always to enrich the Church with authentic preachers of the Gospel". One week later, speaking about Saint Anthony of Padua, the Pope concluded his remarks with the appeal, "May preachers, drawing inspiration from ... [Saint Anthony's] example, be effective in their communication by taking pains to combine solid and sound doctrine with sincere and fervent devotion".With these words the Holy Father is reminding us of the important formative roles the saints occupy in our lives. The Pope explained that they serve as inspirations and examples for us as we try to live good lives and they act as intercessors on our behalf before the Throne of God.Therefore, we are not simply engaging in a sentimental remembering of noteworthy people from the past when we celebrate a saints' day. Indeed, the saints not only teach us that we should lead holy lives, but they show us how! The Church places the saints and their conspicuous virtues before us, so that by cultivating a friendship with a saint through prayer and learning about them, we can grow in our understanding of how they managed to live good lives in the face of all the temptations and discouragement that the people of their own ages must have endured. This is why it is so valuable for us to observe saints' days: we need to keep their good example before us and we need their prayers.So how does one observe a saint's feast day properly? To begin with, it is good to remember that the saints are our friends in heaven. Whereas we hope eventually to enjoy eternity with the saints and thereby share in deep intimacy with each of them, it seems to be in the Providence of God that there are usually several saints whose lives, personalities, mission, struggles or some other aspect of their lives appeal to us uniquely and draw us into friendship with them. It is the Catholic custom: to be named after a saint at Baptism, and many people realize at some point during their lives what a loyal friend or protector or good example their patron saint (i.e. the saint after whom they are named) has been for them.Therefore, a laudable custom is to celebrate one's name day. In many Catholic cultures the custom has been to celebrate one's saint's day (the terms "feast day" and "saint's day" are interchangeable) instead of one's birthday. I suggest celebrating both! Let your patron saint's day be special for you. Be sure to attend Mass that day and spend some time in prayer with your patron saint. Some saints are associated with particular forms of prayers (such as Saint Dominic and the Rosary or Saint Margaret Mary and devotion to the Sacred Heart). Participation in any prayer form uniquely attached to a particular saint is a good way of observing their name day authentically. Other saints have shrines or other holy places associated with them; sometimes a local parish is named after one's favourite saint. One can keep such a saint's feast by making a pilgrimage to that holy place for some time of prayer. Observing each family member's feast day can also be an important way to celebrate a saint's day properly.Wishing someone who might not be active in the faith a happy feast day on the saint's day whose name they bear could be pleasant for them, and in some cases it could serve to be an effective way to signal openness to discussion about the faith with someone who is not practicing their religion. Remember that evangelization is an urgent responsibility for all of the baptized.There are still other practices for celebrating a feast day that can be uniquely beneficial for yourself and others. Many people are moved to make a sacrificial donation to the Church's charitable works upon the occasion of the feast days of the various saints who gave their lives caring for the poor: Saint Vincent de Paul; Bl. Teresa of Calcutta, and others. The feast of a great teacher of the faith like Saint Thomas Aquinas could become an occasion for planning your annual program for studying your faith more closely. For example, you might decide that every year on the Feast of Saint Thomas Aquinas, you will visit the library at your local seminary, convent or theology school and spend time planning a personal religious study program for the coming year. You might end up choosing three good books on the Blessed Mother and resolve to read those books during the course of the coming year. Or you might decide on that day that you will read the sixteen major documents published by Vatican II during the course of the next year.Our Blessed Mother is known by very many titles for a good reason and that is so that each person can relate to her in an intimate and loving manner. It can be good to choose one favourite title for Mary and keep the feast day associated with that title in a personal, prayerful and even celebrative way.In other words, after attending Mass, a good feast day observance can be constructed out of acting on any form of inspiration that a particular saint provides. God gave us the saints as our brothers and sisters to inspire us, to protect us and to intercede for us. The keeping of the saints' feast days is a keenly authentic form of Catholic spirituality. It behooves each of us to commemorate, in our own way, those saints who have had a special influence in our lives or who have won a special place in our hearts. And when we honour one of the saints, we are honouring God and growing in our love for Him at the same time. After all, the wise person takes to heart the lesson every Catholic hears many times over in life through the last of the Divine Praises at Benediction, "Blessed be God in His angels and in His Saints".*Professor of Liturgy, Homiletics and Spiritual Theology, Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas, RomeTaken from: L'Osservatore Romano Weekly Edition in English 9 November 2011, page 16L'Osservatore Romano is the newspaper of the Holy See. The Weekly Edition in English is published for the US by:The Cathedral Foundation L'Osservatore Romano English Edition 880 Park Avenue P.O. Box 777 Baltimore, MD 21203 Phone: (443) 263-0248 Fax: (443) 524-3155 lormail@catholicreview.org Feast Days in the Catholic Church are one way we celebrate God's Family, the Church. If you look at a Catholic calendar, you have probably noticed how many days are marked as "feast days." A special part of living the Catholic faith is how we mark time—since we see the Church as being the family of God, we do what families naturally do—we celebrate "milestones" of family members. That's what a feast day is—a celebration of a milestone of a saint or of an important day in the life of our family as a whole. In our earthly families, we celebrate birthdays, weddings, and special events like a graduation. We usually gather for a meal and often include traditions like retelling stories, looking at old photos or videos, or favorite family activities like singing or games. In the family of God, we celebrate our family's special events a little bit differently—most of our feast days are "death days"—the day a saint died! For example, we celebrate the feast of St. Augustine on August 28, because that's the day he died in the year 430. We celebrate the feast of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton on January 4 because that's the day she died in 1821. It might seem morbid at first glance, but it is not with regard to a saint—someone we know is in heaven. A saint's death day is their birthday in heaven! There are over 5,000 canonized saints in the Catholic Church—we don't have that many days in a year to celebrate each one! So not all saints have a unique day, or feast, in their honor. We honor all the saints in heaven—canonized or not—on, naturally enough, the Solemnity of All Saints on November 1. Perhaps you caught that word "solemnity" that I just used in reference to All Saints. This brings up my second point—the different types of feast days that you will experience in the Catholic calendar. We'll go over them according to their level of importance— First, we have holy days of obligation. These celebrations are so important that we expect all the family to show up at the family get-together—the Mass! Missing a holy day for our church family is like missing a big event in your family—you better have a really good reason to miss Christmas day with the family, for example! Every Sunday is a holy day of obligation—because every Sunday is a little Easter: a day we commemorate Jesus' victory over sin and death by his Resurrection. Every Sunday we are obliged to attend Mass unless we are sick, caring for someone, or some other serious reason (like a pandemic...). We also have other holy days of obligation throughout the year—these are the days that celebrate the truly central milestones of our family life. They are connected to the life of Jesus, his mother Mary and our entire family, the Church. We are obliged to go to Mass on a holy day of obligation even when it doesn't fall on a Sunday. These holy days include: Christmas (December 25),the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God (January 1)the Ascension of Our Lord (40 days after Easter Sunday)the Assumption of Mary (August 15)the Solemnity of All Saints (November 1)the Immaculate Conception of the BVM (December 8) So Holy Days of Obligation are the primary feasts of the Church's calendar year—they are the days set aside to gather as a family to celebrate, to remember, to re-commit and to re-charge. The next level of holy days include other Solemnities. The Holy Days of Obligation are Solemnities, but not all Solemnities are Holy Days of Obligation. Any Solemnity is an important feast day that is celebrated with a special Mass just for that day. Many of these Solemnities have to do with the life of Jesus. For example, we have a Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe at the end of November. Other Solemnities are dedicated to the saints closest to the Lord during his earthly life—Mary his Mother, Joseph his foster Father, John the Baptist, his cousin. When a Solemnity falls on a Sunday, that Sunday is dedicated to its celebration. When a Solemnity falls on a Friday, the faithful are encouraged to celebrate the Solemnity and not abstain from meat or do other penitential practices. Solemnities are days to celebrate! The next level of feast days are called "Feasts"—these celebrate canonized saints whose contributions have had a universal impact, such as the 12 Apostles or other great teachers and leaders throughout our history. Some Feast days celebrate a feature in the life of Jesus Christ—for example we celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on September 14 to honor Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. A priest must use the Mass for Solemnities and Feast days when he celebrates a daily Mass—except Feast Days are not usually celebrated when they fall on a Sunday. "Feast" days are called feast days because they do often involve special meals and activities for that particular day. For example, the Feast of the Archangels on September 29 is associated with special "harvest" foods and often a roasted goose in some European countries. The Feast of St. Nicholas on December 6 has often included parades, appearances of the fiery bishop and gifts left in stockings. (Well, St. Nicholas used to be named a feast day—now it is an optional memorial for the universal church-more about that in a minute). You can find out more about these traditional celebrations on the website Catholic Culture. There are also great books you can use to reacquaint your family with these feast day celebrations: I recommend "Cooking with the Saints". Finally, our calendar is filled with "Memorials" and "Optional Memorials" to honor saints throughout each month. A memorial is a day dedicated to a saint. The Mass for a Memorial includes special mention of the saint (usually a quality of the saint that we ask God to help us emulate). A priest must celebrate a Memorial as the primary daily Mass—unless it's a Sunday (then the Sunday Mass supersedes it) or for a serious pastoral reason such as a funeral. An "Optional Memorial" is just that—celebrating that saint or event in the church is an option for a priest at Mass, but not required. Optional Memorials are often connected to saints whose impact is more regional—so, for example, the feast day of St. Juan Diego is an optional memorial on December 9. St. Juan Diego's vision of Our Blessed Mother as Our Lady of Guadalupe is of great importance to the Church in the Americas (she is named as Patroness of the Americas), but maybe not so much to the world-wide church. Any priest in any country can celebrate an optional memorial—it's just not required. Many priests choose not to celebrate every optional memorial so that the Daily Masses at their parishes can proceed with the regular schedule of Bible readings and keep some continuity in our progress through the Bible. Okay, I've explained the purpose of feast days in the family of the Catholic Church, and I have given you a brief overview of the different types of feast days: Holy Days of Obligation, Solemnities, Feast Days, Memorials and Optional Memorials. Now it's time to ask: What's the point for your spiritual growth? I encourage you to use the feast days of the Church to mark the passage of time for your family—and to deepen your connection to the Communion of Saints of which you belong! Pick just a few days in the year to start with so that you're not overwhelmed. Celebrate our heroes, take time to learn about them, find ways to incorporate special foods and activities for the saints most connected to your family—begin with the saints that you are named after, those who most inspire you, those connected to your occupation, ancestry, ethnicity or in some other way. Embrace the history, heritage and heroism of our saints. Allow your journey around the sun each year to be impacted by the journey of the Son of God in salvation history! Doing so can enrich and strengthen your spiritual life! The Church inherited the idea of a festival/liturgical calendar from the Jews. What exactly is a Feast day? Why and how do we celebrate them? A feast day can be defined simply as a day designated to celebrate the life of a certain saint or event in the life of the Church. Some of the more popular feast days include St. Patrick, St. Francis, Our Lady of the Rosary, and All Saints' Day. In the early days of the church, martyrs were remembered and celebrated by their communities on the day of their death or birth. The custom expanded gradually to include all the saints, whether martyrs or not. The word 'feast' comes from the Latin word festes, which means making merry or celebrating something. What better word to use when celebrating the saints who have come before us as well as the other liturgical feasts of the Church? On Feast days we pay special recognition and honor to our brothers and sisters who have been acknowledged by Mother Church to be in Heaven. Note that the Church acknowledges formally only certain individuals to have acted with "Heroic virtue". These we know as the saints. However, remember that being a saint is our destiny, as all who live in heaven with God are saints, whether they are formally recognized as such or not. It is especially important to keep our forefathers and mothers in the faith in mind on the day set aside to honor them and to attend Mass. On a saint's feast day, we can deepen our knowledge of their lives and extract precious information for our own sanctification. Someone once said, "It pays to hang out with holy people". Thankfully we can interact with them whether they have gone ahead of us or are still on earth. Hebrews 12:1- reminds us, "Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin that clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us". Reading the lives of the saints and going to particular shrines, like Lourdes or Fatima, also help us to focus us on what really matters. Keep in mind the effect that the simple act of reading the lives of the saints had on people like St. Ignatius of Loyola. Melissa Trolio, Director of Mission at Santa Maria College, said it best when she said: "By reminding us of the order, meaning and purpose of our lives, feasting is a way to experience and participate in the joy that God provides. It also gives us an incredible opportunity to extend Jesus' hospitality and generosity to others and to invite them to experience the joy of Jesus and community as well." All Saints' Day is coming up on November 1, and it is a particularly special feast day. It is the day when we as Catholics honor all saints, known or unknown. This day is also a Holy Day of Obligation, meaning all Catholics should go to mass to celebrate and pray. What will you do to remember the saints this All Saints' Day? How will you use feast days to catch the fire of the saints and live more fully as a committed Christian? A Holy Day of Obligation, this feast honors the Blessed Virgin Mary as the Mother of Jesus, emphasizing her role in salvation history. It is also a day of prayer for world peace.Celebrates the visit of the Magi (Three Wise Men) to the infant Jesus, signifying the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles. Many cultures observe it with special traditions such as gifts, processions, and blessing of homes.Commemorates Mary and Joseph presenting Jesus in the temple, where Simeon recognized Him as the "Light to the Nations." It is called Candlemas because of the blessing of candles symbolizing Christ as the Light of the World.Marks the beginning of Lent, a 40-day season of fasting, prayer, and penance. Catholics receive ashes on their foreheads as a sign of repentance and mortality.Honors St. Joseph, the foster father of Jesus and the patron saint of workers and the Universal Church. Many cultures celebrate with special meals, particularly in Italy and among Italian-American communities.Celebrates the Angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she would conceive Jesus through the Holy Spirit. This feast is exactly nine months before Christmas, emphasizing the Incarnation of Christ.Commemorates Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, where crowds welcomed Him with palm branches. It marks the start of Holy Week.The day of the Last Supper, when Jesus instituted the Eucharist and priesthood. The Church often celebrates with the Washing of the Feet, recalling Jesus' act of humility.A solemn day marking Jesus' crucifixion and death. Catholics fast and pray, attending the Stations of the Cross and the Veneration of the Cross.The day of waiting, when Jesus lay in the tomb. The Easter Vigil Mass, held after sunset, is the most beautiful liturgy of the year, featuring the blessing of fire, the Easter candle, and baptisms.The most important feast in Christianity, celebrating Jesus' resurrection and victory over sin and death. It is a joyful time with Mass, feasting, and traditions like egg hunts (symbolizing new life).Instituted by St. John Paul II, this day emphasizes God's boundless mercy, inspired by the visions of St. Faustina Kowalska. Many Catholics pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet. Skip to main contentAccessibility feedbackFeasts (Lat. Festum; Gr. eorte), ECCLESIASTICAL, or Holy Days, are days which are celebrated in commemoration of the sacred mysteries and events recorded in the history of our redemption, in memory of the Virgin Mother of Christ, or of His apostles, martyrs, and saints, by special services and rest from work. A feast not only commemorates an event or person, but also serves to excite the spiritual life by reminding us of the event it commemorates. At certain hours Jesus Christ invites us to His vineyard (Matt., xx, 1-15); He is born in our hearts at Christmas; on Good Friday we nail ourselves to the cross with Him; at Easter we rise from the tomb of sin; and at Pentecost we receive the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Every religion has its feasts, but none has such a rich and judiciously constructed system of festive seasons as the Catholic Church. The succession of these seasons forms the ecclesiastical year, in which the feasts of Our Lord form the ground and framework, the feasts of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints the ornamental tracery. Prototypes and starting-points for the oldest ecclesiastical feasts are the Jewish solemnities of Easter and Pentecost. Together with the weekly Lord's Day, they remained the only universal Christian feasts down to the third century (Tertullian, "De bapt." 19; Origen, "Contra Celsum", VIII, 22). Two feasts of Our Lord (Epiphany, Christmas) were added in the fourth century; then came the feasts of the Apostles and martyrs, in particular provinces; later on also those of some confessors (St. Martin, St. Gregory); in the sixth and seventh centuries feasts of the Blessed Virgin were added. After the triumph of Christianity, in the fourth and fifth centuries, the sessions of the civil courts were prohibited on all feasts, also the games in the circus and theatrical performances, in order to give an opportunity to all to hear Mass. In the course of centuries the ecclesiastical calendar expanded considerably, because in earlier ages every bishop had a right to establish new feasts. Later on a reduction of feasts took place, partly by regular ecclesiastical legislation, partly in consequence of revolutions in State and Church. The Statutes of Bishop Sonnatius of Reims (see Christian Calendar. III, 163), in 620, mention eleven feasts; the Statutes of St. Boniface ("Statuta", Mansi XII, 383), nineteen days, "in quibus sabbatizandum", i. e., days of rest. In England (ninth century) the feasts were confined to Christmas, Epiphany, three days of Easter, Assumption, Sts. Peter and Paul, St. Gregory, and All Saints. Before the reign of King Edgar (959-75), three festivals of the B. V. Mary, and the days kept in honor of the Apostles were added; in the tenth year of Ethelred (989), the feast of St. Edward the Martyr (March 18), and in the reign of Canute, or Cnut (1017-35), that of St. Dunstan (May 19), were added. The feasts in the Statutes of Lanfranc (d. 1089) are quite numerous, and are divided into three classes (Migne, P.L., CL, 472-78). The Decree of Gratian (about 1150) mentions forty-one feasts besides the diocesan patronal celebrations; the Decretals of Gregory IX (about 1235) mention forty-five public feasts and Holy Days, which means eighty-five days when no work could be done, and ninety-five days when no court sessions could be held. In many provinces eight days after Easter, in some also the week after Pentecost (or at least four days), had the sabbath rest. From the thirteenth to the eighteenth century there were dioceses in which the Holy Days and Sundays amounted to over one hundred, not counting the feasts of particular monasteries and churches. In the Byzantine empire there were sixty-six entire Holy Days (Constitution of Manuel Comnenus, in 1166), exclusive of Sundays, and twenty-seven half Holy Days. In the fifteenth century, Gerson, Nicolas de Clemangers and others protested against the multiplication of feasts, as an oppression of the poor, and proximate occasions of excesses. The long needed reduction of feast days was made by Urban VIII (Universa per orbem, September 13, 1642). There remained thirty-six feasts or eighty-five days free from labor. Pope Urban limited the right of the bishops to establish new Holy Days; this right is now not abrogated, but antiquated. A reduction for Spain by Benedict XIII (1727) retained only seventeen feasts; and on the nineteen abrogated Holy Days only the hearing of Mass was obligatory. This reduction was extended (1748) to Sicily. For Austria (1745) the number had been reduced to fifteen full Holy Days; but since the hearing of Mass on the abrogated feasts, or half Holy Days, and the fast on the vigils of the Apostles were poorly observed, Clement XIV ordered that sixteen full feasts should be observed; he did away with the half Holy Days, which however continued to be observed in the rural districts (peasant Holy Days, Bauernfeiertage). The parish priests have to say Mass for the people on all the abrogated feasts. The same reduction was introduced into Bavaria in 1775, and into Spain in 1791; finally Pius VI extended this provision to other countries and provinces. By the French revolution the ecclesiastical calendar had been radically abolished, and at the reorganization of the French Church, in 1806, only four feasts were retained: Christmas, the Ascension, the Assumption, and All Saints; the other feasts were transferred to Sunday. This reduction was valid also in Belgium and in Germany on the left bank of the Rhine. For the Catholics in England Pius VI (March 19, 1777) established the following list of feasts: Easter and Pentecost two days each, Christmas, New Year's Day, Epiphany, Ascension, Corpus Christi, Annunciation, Assumption, Sts. Peter and Paul, St. George, and All Saints. After the restoration of the hierarchy (1850), the Annunciation, St. George, and the Monday after Easter and Pentecost were abolished. Scotland keeps also the feast of St. Andrew, Ireland the feasts of St. Patrick and the Annunciation. In the United States, the number of feasts was not everywhere the same; the Council of Baltimore wanted only four feasts, but the decree was not approved by Rome; the third Plenary Council of Baltimore (1884), by a general law, retained six feasts: Christmas, New Year's Day, Ascension, Assumption, the Immaculate Conception, and All Saints. Sts. Peter and Paul and Corpus Christi were transferred to the next following Sunday. In the city of Rome the following feasts are of double precept (i.e. of hearing Mass, and rest from work): Christmas, New Year's Day, Epiphany, Purification, St. Joseph, Annunciation, Ascension, St. Philip Neri (May 26), Corpus Christi, Nativity of the B. V. M., All Saints, Conception of the B.V.M., St. John the Evangelist. The civil law in Italy acknowledges: Epiphany, Ascension, Sts. Peter and Paul, Assumption, Nativity, Conception, Christmas, and the patronal feasts. The Greek Church at present observes the following Holy Days: Nativity of Mary, Exaltation of the Cross (September 14), St. Demetrius (October 26), St. Michael (November 8), Entrance of Mary into the Temple (November 21), St. Nicholas (December 6), Conception of St. Anne (December 9), Nativity of Christ, Commemoration of Mary (December 26), St. Stephen (December 27), Circumcision (January 1), Epiphany, the Doctors St. Basil, St. Gregory, St. John Chrysostom (January 30), the Meeting of Christ and Simeon (2 Febr.), Annunciation, St. George (April 23), Nativity of St. John, Sts. Peter and Paul, St. Elias (July 20), Transfiguration (August 6), Assumption, Beheading of St. John (August 29), the Monday after Easter and Pentecost, Ascension of Christ, and the patronal feasts. The Russians have only nine ecclesiastical Holy Days which do not fall on a Sunday, viz.: Nativity, Epiphany, Ascension, Transfiguration, Purification, Annunciation, Assumption, Presentation of Mary (November 21), and-the Exaltation of the Cross. But they have fifty festivals (birthdays, etc.) of the imperial family, on which days not even a funeral can be held. DIVISION OF FEASTS.—Feasts are divided: (a) According to external celebration (feriatio): (I) feasa Pori, or feasts of precept, with double obligation, to rest from work and to hear Mass; (2) testa chori, which are kept only in the liturgy, by the celebration of Mass, and the recitation of the Divine Office. Besides these there were, and still are, in some dioceses (e.g. in Holland), the Half Holy Days, on which the people after having heard Mass can do servile work (Candlemas, Nativity of Mary, and the Immaculate Conception, in the Diocese of Utrecht). According to extension: Universal feasts, celebrated everywhere, at least in the Latin Church; Particular feasts, celebrated only by certain religious orders, countries, provinces, dioceses or towns. These latter are either prescribed by the general rubrics, like the patronal feasts, or are specially approved by the Apostolic See, and prescribed by bishops or synods, for particular countries or dioceses (festa pro aliquibus locis in the Breviary). The universal feasts are contained in the Roman Calendar. According to their position in the calendar: (I) Movable feasts, which always fall on a certain day of the week, depending on the date of Easter, or the position of the Sunday, e.g. Ascension of Christ (forty days after Easter), or the feast of the Holy Rosary, the first Sunday of October; (2) Immovable feasts, which are fixed to a certain date of the month, e.g. Christmas, December 25. In the Armenian Church all the feasts of the year are movable, except six: Epiphany, Purification (14 Febr.), Annunciation (April 7), Nativity (September 8), Presentation (November 21), and (December 8) Conception of Mary (Tondini, "Calendrier liturgique de la Nation Armenienne", Rome,1906) . According to the solemnity of the office or rite (see Christian Calendar and Duplex). Since the thirteenth century there are three kinds of feasts: festum simplex, semiduplex, and duplex, all three regulated by the recitation of the Divine Office or Breviary. The simple feast commences with the chapter (capitulum) of First Vespers, and ends with None. It has three lessons and takes the psalms of Matins from the ferial office; the rest of the office is like the semi-double. The semidouble feast has two Vespers, nine lessons in Matins, and ends with Compline. The antiphons before the psalms are only intoned. In the Mass, the semidouble has always at least three "orationes" or prayers. On a double feast the antiphons are sung in their entirety, before and after the psalms. In Lauds and Vespers there are no suffragia of the saints, and the Mass has only one "oratio" (if there be no commemoration prescribed). The ordinary double feasts are called duplicia minora; occurring with feasts of a higher rank, they can be simplified, except the octave days of some feasts and the feasts of the Doctors of the Church, which are transferred. The feasts of a higher rank are the duplicia majora (introduced by Clement VIII), the duplicia secundce classis and the duplicia primce classis. Some of the latter two classes are kept with octaves. Before the reformation of the Breviary by Pius V (1566-72), the terms by which the solemnity of a feast could be known were, in many churches, very different from the terms we use now. We give a few examples from Grotefend, "Zeitrechnung", etc. (Hanover, 1891-98, II-III): Chur: "Festum summum, plenum officium trium lectionum, commemoratio." Havelberg: "Fes-turn summum, semisummum, secundum, tertium, novem majus, novem minus, compulsatio 3 lect., antiphona." Halle: "Festum praepositi, apostolicum, dominicale, 9 lect., compulsatio 3 lect., antiphona." Breslau: "Festum Triplex, duplex, electionum, elect., commemoratio." Carthusians: "Festum Candelarum, capiterl—2 legit., missa, comine eaatio" –Lund: "Festum Praelatorum, canonicorum, vicariorum, duplex, simplex, 9 lect., 3 lect., memoria." Some of the religious orders which have their own breviary, did not adopt the terms now used in the Roman Breviary. For example, the Cistercians have the following terminology: "Festum sermonis majus, sermonis minus, duarum missarum majus, 2 miss. minus, 12 lectionum, 3 lect, commemoratio." The Dominicans: "Totum duplex, duplex, simplex, 3 lect., memoria." The Carmelites: "Duplex majus I. classis solemnis, dupl. maj. I. el., duplex majus 2. classis, duplex minus I. classis, duplex minus 2. classis, semi-duplex, simplex, simplicissimum." Among the feasts of the same rite there is a difference in dignity. There are (I) primary feasts whichcommemorate the principal mysteries of our religion, or celebrate the death of a saint; (2) secondary feasts, the object of which is a particular feature of a mystery, e.g. the feast of the Crown of Thorns, of the relics of a saint or of some miracle worked by him, e.g. the feast of the translation of St. Stephen, the Apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe, The list of primary and secondary feasts has been determined by a decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites (August 22, 1893), and is found in the introduction to the Roman Breviary. (3) Within the two classes mentioned the feasts of Christ take the first place, especially those with privileged vigils and octaves (Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Pentecost, and Corpus Christi); then follow the feasts of the Blessed Virgin, the Holy Angels, St. John the Baptist, St. Joseph, the Apostles and Evangelists, and the other saints. F. G. HOLWECK Catholic Answers is pleased to provide this unabridged entry from the original Catholic Encyclopedia, published between 1907 and 1912. It is a valuable resource for subjects related to theology, philosophy, history, culture, and more. Like most works that are more than a century old, though, it may occasionally use anachronistic language or present outdated scientific information. Accordingly, in offering this resource Catholic Answers does not thereby endorse every assertion or phrase in it.Did you like this content? Please help keep us ad-free Enjoying this content? Please support our mission!Donatewww.catholic.com/support-us Sadly, most Catholics today don't even celebrate solemnities and feast days at home throughout the liturgical year (Christmas and Easter usually excepted). But why not? Celebrating the feast days of the Church not only "directs our spiritual growth," but it's just plain FUN. Being Catholic offers us opportunities for penance and reflection, for certain, but it also gives us lots of reasons to party…and that's where solemnity and feast day celebrations come in.So, if you aren't already celebrating feast days on your own or at home with your family, here are some quick hacks and tips to get you started:Decide which feasts that you'll make a special effort to celebrate at home. There are a lot of feasts days in the Church, so I recommend you first focus on celebrating solemnities, feasts days of the highest rank in the liturgical calendar. This means a rough average of a couple celebrations per month, which is doable for most of us! You can also add in a few feast days that may be particularly meaningful to your family. For example, we celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe at our house, since she's always been a special intercessor for us.Put them on the calendar and plan ahead. Take note of when the feast or solemnity will occur (some dates fluctuate a little from year to year) and set a digital or written reminder a few days before the feast to get your celebration activity, food, prayers, songs, and so forth in order. I strongly recommend you sign up for these feast day reminder emails, which will alert you to an approaching solemnity AND give you resources for learning more about the feast and celebrating it at home.Learn about the solemnity or feast you'll be celebrating. It is pretty crucial that you know a decent bit of information (at least the basics) about the feast day you're planning to commemorate. Read some articles about the history of the feast day, ways that the Church celebrates it, and ideas for bringing the feast day to life in your home in a memorable way. Share what you've learned about the feast day or solemnity with your family. (Again, CelebrateTheFeasts.com directs you to great articles and resources to learn about the solemnities on the Church calendar.) Prepare your feast day celebration(s). Put your grocery list (for a meal that corresponds to the feast day; for example, you may make a meal with all white foods representing purity for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception) or craft supply list together a few days ahead and shop for what you need. Select any prayers or songs you might pray/sing on that day and print out copies of the prayer or lyrics for the family. You can browse Catholic blogs and Pinterest for fun ideas to celebrate (or, as I mentioned, make it easy on yourself by using the CelebrateTheFeasts.com reminders and ideas).Now, celebrate the feast! Make a big deal about it on the feast day or solemnity that you've prepared for! Get the family excited for the planned festivities and try and be in good moods as you celebrate throughout the day! Treat it like the holiday (holy day) it is, enjoying the celebrations, however complex or simple they may be.Sometimes, though, even the best laid plans to celebrate a feast day are hard to execute amidst the unexpected twists and turns of daily family life. I recommend that as a backup plan, you do at least one small thing to acknowledge the feast day at home. If it's a Marian feast day, pray a decade of the Rosary. If it's not a Holy Day of Obligation, go to Mass anyway. These simple ways to celebrate don't take any preparation, but help turn your focus to the importance of this day on the Church calendar, and bring your family one step closer to living a vibrant, liturgical, and fun Catholic life at home. Skip to main content Reddit and its partners use cookies and similar technologies to provide you with a better experience. By accepting all cookies, you agree to our use of cookies to deliver and maintain our services and site, improve the quality of Reddit, personalize Reddit content and advertising, and measure the effectiveness of advertising. By rejecting non-essential cookies, Reddit may still use certain cookies to ensure the proper functionality of our platform. For more information, please see our Cookie Notice and our Privacy Policy. (Many of the links in this article redirect to a specific reviewed product. Your purchase of these products through affiliate links helps to generate commission for Christian.net, at no extra cost. Learn more) Feast days hold a significant place in the rich tapestry of Catholicism, serving as occasions of profound spiritual significance and communal celebration. These revered days are steeped in tradition and are pivotal in honoring the lives and legacies of saints, as well as key events in the Christian faith. The observance of feast days is a cherished practice that has endured for centuries, fostering a deep sense of connection and continuity within the Catholic community. Feast days are not merely dates on the calendar; they are vibrant threads woven into the fabric of Catholic tradition, each carrying its own unique symbolism and resonance. These occasions provide a sacred opportunity for believers to reflect on the exemplary lives of saints, whose unwavering devotion and virtuous deeds continue to inspire and guide the faithful. In the following sections, we will delve into the profound significance of feast days in Catholicism, exploring their definition, importance, examples, and the manner in which they are joyously celebrated within the faith. By illuminating the essence of these revered observances, we aim to deepen our understanding of their spiritual and communal significance, and to honor the enduring traditions that continue to enrich the Catholic faith. Read more: What Irish Saint's Feast Day Takes Place During Lent? A feast day in Catholicism is a day set aside to commemorate and honor a specific saint, an event from the life of Jesus Christ, or a mystery of faith. These days are marked by special religious observances, including Masses, prayers, and often, festive gatherings. The concept of feast days has its roots in the early Christian tradition, where the anniversaries of martyrs' deaths were commemorated with solemn ceremonies. Over time, this practice expanded to include the celebration of the lives of renowned saints and significant events in the Christian narrative. Feast days are not confined to a single day; they can span several days, such as the Feast of the Sacred Heart or the Feast of All Saints. Each feast day holds its own distinct significance, often reflecting the virtues and contributions of the saint being honored or the spiritual theme being commemorated. These occasions serve as poignant reminders of the enduring impact of faith and the profound legacy of those who have exemplified unwavering devotion and righteousness. The Catholic Church's liturgical calendar designates specific feast days throughout the year, ensuring that the faithful have the opportunity to honor and draw inspiration from a diverse array of saints and sacred events. These days are integral to the rhythm of the Church's worship and provide a framework for communal reflection and spiritual growth. Moreover, feast days serve as a testament to the continuity of the Catholic faith, connecting believers across generations and continents through shared devotion to the saints and the foundational tenets of Christianity. In essence, feast days in Catholicism encapsulate the timeless tradition of venerating the spiritual luminaries and pivotal moments that have shaped the faith. They offer a profound opportunity for believers to deepen their understanding of the faith's rich heritage and to draw strength from the exemplary lives and teachings of the saints. As such, these cherished observances stand as a testament to the enduring vitality of the Catholic tradition and the enduring relevance of its timeless teachings. Feast days hold profound significance within the framework of Catholicism, serving as pivotal occasions that underscore the enduring spiritual and communal importance of the faith. These revered observances play a multifaceted role in the lives of believers, embodying the timeless values of reverence, remembrance, and communal celebration. Feast days provide a sacred platform for honoring the lives and legacies of revered saints, whose exemplary devotion and virtuous deeds continue to inspire and guide the faithful. Through the commemoration of these spiritual luminaries, feast days serve as a testament to the enduring impact of faith and the profound legacy of those who have exemplified unwavering devotion and righteousness. Moreover, these observances offer a poignant opportunity for believers to reflect on the timeless teachings and exemplary lives of the saints, drawing inspiration from their unwavering commitment to the Christian faith. Feast days offer a structured framework for spiritual reflection and renewal, allowing believers to deepen their understanding of the faith's rich heritage and draw strength from the timeless teachings of the saints. These occasions provide a sacred pause in the rhythm of daily life, inviting individuals to contemplate the virtues and spiritual themes embodied by the saints being honored. Through prayer, meditation, and communal worship, feast days foster a profound sense of spiritual renewal, nurturing the faith and fortifying the spiritual bond that unites the Catholic community. Feast days embody the enduring continuity of the Catholic tradition, connecting believers across generations and continents through shared devotion to the saints and the foundational tenets of Christianity. These observances serve as a testament to the timeless values and teachings that have shaped the faith, fostering a deep sense of connection and continuity within the Catholic community. By venerating the spiritual luminaries and pivotal moments that have shaped the faith, feast days reaffirm the enduring relevance of the Catholic tradition and its timeless teachings, ensuring that its profound legacy continues to resonate across the ages. In essence, feast days in Catholicism encapsulate the timeless tradition of venerating the spiritual luminaries and pivotal moments that have shaped the faith. They offer a profound opportunity for believers to deepen their understanding of the faith's rich heritage and to draw strength from the exemplary lives and teachings of the saints. As such, these cherished observances stand as a testament to the enduring vitality of the Catholic tradition and the enduring relevance of its timeless teachings. Feast days in Catholicism encompass a diverse array of revered saints and sacred events, each carrying its own profound significance and spiritual resonance. These occasions serve as poignant reminders of the enduring impact of faith and the timeless legacy of those who have exemplified unwavering devotion and righteousness. Here are some notable examples of feast days in Catholicism: Celebrated on August 15th, the Feast of the Assumption of Mary commemorates the belief that the Virgin Mary, at the end of her earthly life, was taken up, body and soul, into heavenly glory. This revered feast day underscores the exalted role of Mary in the Christian faith and serves as a testament to her unwavering devotion and profound spiritual significance. Observed on October 4th, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi honors the life and teachings of St. Francis, the patron saint of animals and the environment. This feast day is marked by special blessings of animals and ecological initiatives, reflecting St. Francis' deep reverence for all of God's creation. Celebrated on December 8th

—Christ’s life, death, and resurrection (CCC 1171). By celebrating these days, Catholics recall how God has acted through history. The practice dates back to early Christianity, when martyrs’ deaths were remembered annually. Over time, the calendar grew to include a wide range of feasts, each pointing to divine purpose. The liturgical year is the framework that holds all feast days together in a meaningful sequence. It begins with Advent, preparing for Christ’s birth, and moves through seasons like Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time. Each season highlights different aspects of God’s plan, such as the Incarnation or the Resurrection. Feast days punctuate these seasons, offering moments to pause and reflect on specific elements of faith. For example, the Feast of the Epiphany in January celebrates the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles (Matthew 2:1-12). This event ties directly to God’s intent to extend salvation beyond Israel. The Church carefully arranges these celebrations to mirror the unfolding of salvation history. According to the CCC, the liturgical year makes present the mysteries of Christ in a recurring cycle (CCC 1163). This repetition helps Catholics internalize God’s actions over time. In this way, feast days are not random but part of a larger pattern of worship. Saints’ feast days honor individuals who lived exemplary lives of holiness and fidelity to God. These celebrations typically mark the day of their death, viewed as their entry into eternal life. The Church sees saints as models of how to follow Christ, reflecting God’s grace at work in human lives. For instance, the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul on June 29 recalls their martyrdom and leadership in the early Church (Acts 12:1-11; 2 Timothy 4:6-8). By remembering them, Catholics are reminded of God’s call to discipleship. The CCC teaches that honoring saints glorifies God, who made their holiness possible (CCC 1173). These feast days also encourage prayer for the saints’ intercession, linking the faithful to the communion of saints. This practice underscores God’s plan to unite all believers, living and dead, in one body. Historically, saint veneration grew from the commemoration of martyrs in the first centuries. Today, it remains a key way the Church points to God’s transformative power. Salvation history is the story of God’s relationship with humanity, from creation to redemption. Feast days bring this story into focus by marking its pivotal moments. The Annunciation on March 25, for example, celebrates the angel Gabriel’s message to Mary, initiating the Incarnation (Luke 1:26-38). This event is foundational to God’s plan to save humanity through Christ. Similarly, Pentecost, observed 50 days after Easter, recalls the Holy Spirit’s descent, empowering the Church to spread the Gospel (Acts 2:1-4). Each feast ties back to a specific act of God in history. The CCC notes that the liturgy makes these mysteries present, not just as memories, but as living realities (CCC 1164). Through this, Catholics participate in God’s ongoing work of redemption. The calendar thus becomes a tool to teach and experience salvation step by step. Feast days ensure that no part of this history is overlooked. Solemnities are the highest-ranking feast days, reserved for the most significant mysteries or figures. Examples include Easter Sunday, Christmas, and the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God on January 1. These days often require Catholics to attend Mass and refrain from unnecessary work, emphasizing their importance. Easter, celebrating Christ’s resurrection, is the cornerstone of the faith, showing God’s victory over sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:20-22). Christmas marks the entry of God into human history as a man. The CCC highlights that these solemnities center on the Paschal Mystery, the heart of God’s saving plan (CCC 1171). By observing them, the Church underscores the climactic moments of divine revelation. Historically, solemnities developed to unify believers around core truths. They serve as anchors in the liturgical year, keeping God’s actions at the forefront. This focus reveals the depth of God’s commitment to humanity. Marian feast days, honoring the Virgin Mary, hold a special place in the Catholic calendar. Feasts like the Assumption (August 15) and the Immaculate Conception (December 8) highlight her unique role in salvation. The Assumption celebrates Mary’s bodily ascent into heaven, a sign of God’s promise of resurrection for all (1 Corinthians 15:52-53). The Immaculate Conception affirms her preservation from original sin, preparing her to bear Christ. These events show God’s careful preparation for the Incarnation. The CCC teaches that Mary’s life is inseparable from her Son’s mission (CCC 487). Her feast days thus reflect God’s will to involve humanity in redemption. Early Church Fathers saw her as the “New Eve,” reversing the Fall through her obedience. Catholics honor her not as divine, but as the greatest example of cooperation with God’s grace. These feasts remind believers of God’s intent to sanctify and elevate humanity. Many feast days occur on fixed dates, chosen for historical or symbolic reasons. The Nativity of John the Baptist on June 24, for instance, aligns with the summer solstice in some traditions, symbolizing his role as a light pointing to Christ (John 1:6-9). Others, like St. Patrick’s Day on March 17, mark the saint’s death. Fixed dates create a rhythm in the Church year, grounding the faithful in tradition. The CCC explains that the liturgy sanctifies time by connecting it to God’s actions (CCC 1163). This practice dates to early Christianity, when martyrdom anniversaries were fixed on calendars. Over centuries, the Church assigned dates to reflect theological meaning or historical accuracy. Some feasts, like Christmas on December 25, likely adapted earlier cultural dates to emphasize Christ’s coming. This intentionality shows God’s plan unfolding through human time. Fixed feast days help Catholics see history as purposeful. Movable feast days shift each year based on the date of Easter, which depends on the lunar calendar. Easter Sunday, set as the first Sunday after the first full moon of spring, anchors feasts like Ash Wednesday and Pentecost. This system ties the Church year to ancient Jewish practices, such as Passover (Exodus 12:1-14). Movable feasts highlight the dynamic nature of God’s plan, unfolding in relation to Christ’s resurrection. The CCC notes that Easter is the “feast of feasts,” shaping the entire liturgical cycle (CCC 1169). By adjusting dates annually, the Church keeps the focus on the Paschal Mystery. Historically, this approach unified Christian celebrations across regions. It also reflects the Jewish roots of Christianity, adapted to proclaim Christ. Movable feasts ensure that God’s redemptive acts remain central. They invite flexibility while preserving meaning. Ordinary Time, the longest season, fills the gaps between major liturgical periods like Christmas and Easter. Its feast days, often memorials of saints, emphasize God’s presence in everyday life. For example, the Feast of St. Anthony of Padua on June 13 honors a preacher known for his care for the poor (Matthew 25:35-40). These feasts show that holiness is possible outside dramatic events. The CCC teaches that the liturgical year includes time to grow in faith beyond high points (CCC 1171). Ordinary Time feasts thus reflect God’s plan to sanctify all moments, not just the extraordinary. They encourage steady devotion and imitation of the saints. Historically, this season developed to balance the calendar’s intensity. It provides space to apply lessons from major feasts. In this way, God’s will extends into daily existence. Feast days bring Catholics together in shared worship and celebration. Major solemnities like Christmas or local saints’ days often involve communal Masses, processions, or festivals. This unity reflects the Church as the Body of Christ, a key part of God’s design (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). The CCC states that liturgy is a communal act, strengthening bonds among believers (CCC 1140). Feast days also connect the global Church, as Catholics worldwide honor the same events or saints. Historically, these celebrations built solidarity in early Christian communities under persecution. Today, they maintain a sense of belonging across cultures. For example, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12 unites millions in Mexico and beyond. This communal aspect reveals God’s intent for a united people. Feast days thus serve both spiritual and social purposes. Feast days call Catholics to grow in faith by reflecting on God’s works and the saints’ examples. Each celebration offers a chance to pray, attend Mass, or study scripture tied to the occasion. The Feast of the Transfiguration on August 6, for instance, invites contemplation of Christ’s glory (Matthew 17:1-8). The CCC teaches that the liturgy nourishes spiritual life, drawing believers closer to God (CCC 1167). By observing feast days, Catholics align their lives with divine truths. Saints’ feasts, like that of St. Thérèse of Lisieux on October 1, inspire virtues such as humility. Historically, the Church used these days to catechize and encourage piety. They remain opportunities for personal renewal today. This focus on holiness mirrors God’s desire for humanity’s sanctification. Feast days are thus tools for spiritual growth. Certain feast days, like Holy Days of Obligation, require Catholics to attend Mass and rest from unnecessary work. Examples include the Solemnity of All Saints on November 1 and the Immaculate Conception. These obligations emphasize the importance of the events or figures being honored. The CCC explains that such days mark key moments in salvation, deserving special reverence (CCC 1172). By mandating participation, the Church ensures the faithful engage with God’s plan directly. Historically, these obligations reinforced communal worship in medieval Christianity. They also set aside time for God amid daily demands. Today, the number of obligatory feasts varies by region, but their purpose remains consistent. This structure reflects God’s call to prioritize worship. Obligations highlight the seriousness of divine mysteries. Feast days are deeply rooted in the Bible, drawing meaning from God’s word. The Nativity of Christ on December 25 fulfills prophecies like Isaiah 7:14, celebrating the promised Messiah. Saints’ feasts often tie to their scriptural roles, such as John the Baptist’s in Luke 1:57-66. The CCC teaches that the liturgy proclaims scripture to reveal God’s plan (CCC 1154). Each feast day’s readings at Mass are chosen to reflect its theme. This connection ensures that celebrations are grounded in revelation, not mere tradition. Early Christians linked feasts to biblical events to teach the faith. Over time, the lectionary formalized this practice. By hearing scripture, Catholics see God’s actions unfold. Feast days thus become living encounters with the word. Feast days evolved over centuries, beginning with early Christian commemorations of martyrs. By the fourth century, events like Easter and Christmas gained prominence as the Church grew. Saints’ days multiplied as veneration spread, often tied to local devotion. The CCC notes that the liturgical year developed to reflect Christ’s mysteries systematically (CCC 1163). Medieval Christianity added feasts like Corpus Christi, emphasizing the Eucharist. The Council of Trent in the 16th century standardized many celebrations. Modern reforms, like those of Vatican II, simplified the calendar for clarity. This history shows the Church adapting to express God’s plan over time. Feast days remain a blend of scripture, tradition, and culture. Their growth mirrors the faith’s deepening understanding. While the Church’s calendar is universal, local feast days reflect regional traditions. The Feast of St. Joseph on March 19, for example, is especially prominent in Italy and Spain. In Mexico, Our Lady of Guadalupe’s feast includes unique customs like pilgrimages. The CCC allows such variations, provided they align with core teachings (CCC 1202). This flexibility shows God’s plan embracing diverse peoples. Historically, the Church incorporated local practices to evangelize effectively. Today, these differences enrich global Catholicism. They also highlight the universal call to holiness in distinct ways. Yet, major feasts like Easter remain consistent worldwide. Cultural variety thus complements the Church’s unity. In a modern world, feast days retain value by connecting believers to God’s timeless plan. They offer a counterpoint to secular routines, inviting reflection on eternal truths. The CCC affirms that the liturgy remains a source of grace in every age (CCC 1168). Feasts like Pentecost remind Catholics of the Spirit’s ongoing presence (Acts 2:1-4). Saints’ days inspire virtues needed in contemporary challenges. Historically, feast days sustained faith through wars, plagues, and change. Today, they provide stability amid rapid cultural shifts. They also foster community in an individualistic society. By celebrating them, Catholics affirm God’s relevance now. Feast days thus bridge past, present, and future. Feast days point beyond this life to the fullness of God’s kingdom. Solemnities like All Saints’ Day on November 1 celebrate the heavenly reality awaiting the faithful (Revelation 7:9-14). The CCC teaches that the liturgy is a foretaste of eternal worship (CCC 1137). By participating, Catholics prepare for union with God. Saints’ feasts show the destiny of those who follow Christ. Historically, early Christians saw feasts as rehearsals for heaven. This eschatological focus shapes the Church’s calendar. It reminds believers that earthly time leads to eternity. Feast days thus orient life toward its ultimate goal. They reveal God’s plan as eternal, not temporary. Feast days teach Catholics about God’s character and will through concrete examples. The Epiphany reveals His desire to include all nations in salvation (Matthew 2:1-12). Saints’ lives show His grace active in human weakness. The CCC calls the liturgical year a school of faith (CCC 1168). Each feast offers lessons in trust, obedience, or love. Historically, the Church used these days to educate the illiterate through ritual and story. Today, they remain a source of wisdom for all. They also correct misunderstandings about God’s nature. By studying them, Catholics grow in knowledge and devotion. Feast days thus deepen understanding of divine purpose. Feast days blend celebration with reflection, mirroring God’s plan of redemption. Solemnities like Easter call for joy in Christ’s triumph (John 16:22), while memorials may inspire sober imitation of a saint’s sacrifices. The CCC notes that the liturgy includes both praise and repentance (CCC 1140). This balance reflects the human condition—fallen yet redeemed. Historically, feasts often followed fasts, like Christmas after Advent. Today, this rhythm persists in seasons like Lent and Easter. It teaches that joy flows from sacrifice, as in Christ’s life. Feast days thus capture the full scope of faith. They show God’s mercy alongside His call to holiness. This duality prepares believers for both earthly and eternal life. Feast days align with God’s plan by recalling His acts, honoring His saints, and preparing His people for eternity. They structure time to reveal salvation step by step, from creation to redemption. The CCC affirms that the liturgical year centers on Christ, fulfilling God’s promises (CCC 1171). Each feast, whether joyous or solemn, points to His love and justice. Saints’ days extend this by showing holiness in action. Historically, the Church crafted the calendar to mirror divine intent. Today, feast days remain a living witness to faith. They connect past events to present hope. By celebrating them, Catholics affirm God’s purposeful design. Yes, feast days truly reflect His plan, guiding believers to Him. The first words of the Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar, drawn from the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, summarize the profound meaning of the liturgical celebrations of the Church and their organization:Holy Church celebrates the saving work of Christ on prescribed days in the course of the year with sacred remembrance. Each week, on the day called the Lord's Day, she commemorates the Resurrection of the Lord, which she also celebrates once a year in the great Paschal Solemnity, together with his blessed Passion. In fact, throughout the course of the year the Church unfolds the entire mystery of Christ and observes the birthdays of the Saints. (no. 1)The liturgical year consists of a seasonal cycle and a sanctoral cycle, called the Proper of Time and the Proper of Saints, respectively. Both are organized and published in a liturgical calendar, which is also enriched by observances proper to local Churches, whether national, diocesan, parish-level, or religious community. The Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ—his suffering, death, and resurrection—is continuously proclaimed and renewed through celebrating the events of his life and in the feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints.Liturgical YearThe liturgical year is made up of six seasons:Advent - four weeks of preparation before the celebration of Jesus' birthChristmas - recalling the Nativity of Jesus Christ and his manifestation to the peoples of the worldLent - a six-week period of penance before EasterSacred Paschal Triduum - the holiest "Three Days" of the Church's year, where the Christian people recall the suffering, death, and resurrection of JesusEaster - 50 days of joyful celebration of the Lord's resurrection from the dead and his sending forth of the Holy SpiritOrdinary Time - divided into two sections (one span of 4-8 weeks after Christmas Time and another lasting about six months after Easter Time), wherein the faithful consider the fullness of Jesus' teachings and works among his peopleThe mystery of Christ, unfolded through the cycle of the year, calls us to live his mystery in our own lives. This call is best illustrated in the lives of Mary and the saints, celebrated by the Church throughout the year. There is no tension between the mystery of Christ and the celebration of the saints, but rather a marvelous harmony. The Blessed Virgin Mary is joined by an inseparable bond to the saving work of her Son, and the feasts of all the saints proclaim the wonderful works of Christ in his servants and offer the faithful fitting examples for their imitation.Each liturgical year begins on the First Sunday of Advent during the preceding calendar year (i.e., the First Sunday of Advent in 2019 began the 2020 liturgical year).Liturgical CalendarThe organization of each liturgical year is governed by the Church and ultimately integrated into a liturgical calendar.The Second Vatican Council brought renewed emphasis to Sunday as a unique liturgical category: "the Lord's day is the original feast day" (Sacrosanctum Concilium, no. 106), and it "must be observed in the universal Church as the primordial holy day of obligation" (Code of Canon Law, canon 1246 §1). Thus, only a limited number of feasts of the Lord or the saints may take the place of the scheduled Sunday celebration.Saints and other celebrations are distinguished in accordance with the importance assigned to each one: each is a Solemnity, Feast, or Memorial. Sundays and Solemnities begin their celebration on the evening before, Feasts and Memorials are celebrated over the course of one day, and Memorials are either Obligatory or Optional.Holy days of obligation (also known as feasts of precept) are days when the faithful are obliged to participate at Mass and abstain from unnecessary work or other activities which hinder the suitable relaxation of mind and body. Each Sunday is a holy day of obligation, and six Solemnities are also observed as feasts of precept in the United States.Finally, there are other days of prayer and special observances throughout the year that are promoted by the Holy See or the USCCB. For the most part, they are not part of the Church's liturgical calendar, but they can help focus the prayers of the Church toward the particular needs of the human family.Holy Days of Obligation Days of Prayer and Special ObservancesGeneral Roman Calendar and Recent Additions/ChangesThe General Roman Calendar includes "both the entire cycle of celebrations of the mystery of salvation in the Proper of Time, and that of those Saints who have universal significance and therefore are obligatorily celebrated by everyone, and of other Saints who demonstrate the universality and continuity of sainthood within the People of God" (Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar, no. 49).After the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the General Roman Calendar was first promulgated in 1969 by Pope Saint Paul VI, and has subsequently been amended over the years by the Holy See with new celebrations. The last major revision was in 2002, but since the publication of the Roman Missal, Third Edition, the following celebrations have been added to the General Roman Calendar or otherwise changed:U.S. Proper Calendar and Recent AdditionsThe calendar for the universal Church is complemented in this country by the Proper Calendar for the Dioceses of the United States of America, most recently approved in 2010. Two Optional Memorials have been added to the U.S. Proper Calendar since the 2011 implementation of the Roman Missal, Third Edition, and the Mass formulary for one Memorial has been expanded:Proper Calendar Given that there are thousands of canonized saints, we have many opportunities to celebrate a saint’s feast day. That very term “feast day” tells us that these are celebratory events. But how should we celebrate these feasts? Like a normal secular holiday with BBQ and beer? Probably not. Several saints in our Catholic history teach us how we ought to celebrate a saint’s feast day properly. One thing that St. Augustine stresses very often in his sermons is that we should imitate the saints and follow their examples. He says, “exult and rejoice on the days of the holy martyrs; pray that you may be able to follow in the footsteps of the martyrs” (Sermon 273.9). About saints Perpetua and Felicity he says, “it is no small part of imitation, to rejoice together in the virtues of those who are better than we are” (Sermon 280.6). Later, he says about them as well, “by the example, you see, of their glorious struggle they encourage us to imitate them” (Sermon 281.2). Preaching about St. Lawrence, Augustine speaks, “let us follow his footsteps in faith” (Sermon 303.2). Augustine then makes a connection between celebrating of the saints’ feast days and imitating them. He preaches, “so I am urged to speak to your graces, and urge you to celebrate the feasts of the martyrs in such a way that you also take delight in imitating them by following in their footsteps” (Sermon 285.1). And further, “so let us follow in the footsteps of the martyrs by imitating them, or else we will be celebrating their festivities for no purpose. . . let us be on our toes to imitate the martyrs, if we want the feast days we celebrate to be of any use to us” (Sermon 302.1,9). Basically, Augustine is saying that it is silly and futile to celebrate the saints’ feast days if we are not going to at least try to imitate them. For Augustine, an important part of being able to emulate the saints is being able to relate to the saints. We must be able to see the similarities between ourselves and them so that we will know that it is possible for us to imitate them. He says, “God wished there to be persons of all ages and either sex among the examples given by the martyrs” (Sermon 305A.2). He also stresses the fact that they were mere humans, just like us, “may the holy martyrs pray for us that we should not only celebrate their feast but also imitate their virtues. Let us love their confession of faith, let us applaud their crowns, and let us not despair. We too, after all, are human just like them” (Sermon 299F.4). He explains this idea in more detail: “‘But it’s too much for me,’ he says, ‘to imitate the Lord.’ By the grace of the Lord, then, imitate your fellow servant, imitate Stephen, imitate Marianus and James. They were only human, they were fellow servants of yours; born just like you, but crowned by the one who was not born in that way” (Sermon 284.6). So, throughout his sermons, St. Augustine kept teaching his flock to imitate the saints. He went a little further to say that if we do not try to imitate them, then we are failing to celebrate their feast day well – so celebrating their feast days must include our attempts to imitate their virtues. He also points to the humanity of the saints, that they were no different than us. Because of this, we have genuine hope of being able to imitate them successfully, it is not an impossible goal. St John Vianney also taught, in his homilies, how we ought to celebrate a saint’s feast day. In one of Vianney’s homilies, he rebukes his congregation for the way they regularly celebrated saints’ feast days. He first describes how feast days were kept in the early Church and then contrasts that with how his congregation had been celebrating them: “In the early days of the church, the faithful of one providence, or district, used to come together publicly on the feast day of a saint in order to have the holiness of participating in all the graces which God bestows on such days. The office of the vigil was started. The evening and night were spent in prayer at the tomb of the saint. The faithful heard the word of God. They sang hymns and canticles in honor of the saint. After passing the night so devoutly, they heard Mass, at which all those assisting had the happiness of going to Holy Communion. Then they all withdrew, praising God for the triumphs he had accorded the saint and the graces He had bestowed in response to the latter’s intercession. After that, my dear brethren, who could doubt but that God pours out His graces in abundance upon such a reunion of the faithful and that the saints themselves are happy to be the patrons of such people. That was the way in which the feast days of patron saints was celebrated in olden times. What do you think of that? Is it thus that we celebrate such feasts today? Alas! If the first Christians were to come back upon this earth, would they not tell us that our feasts are no different from those that the pagans kept? Is it not the general rule that God is most seriously offended on these holy days? Does it not seem, rather, that we combine our money and our energies together to multiply sin almost to infinity?” (We Are Keeping A Feast). Apparently, the people in John Vianney’s parish did not celebrate feats days well but were instead prone to drunkenness and gluttony on those days. Can we honestly say we have never done such things? Have we taken feast days (or other holidays – holy days) as opportunities to praise God, or have we focused on the party and fun we can have? John Vianney is clear that the chief act of celebration on a feast day is the supernatural feast which is the Eucharist and the extra prayers to the saint, not the natural feast of ordinary food and fun. If we celebrate the saints’ feast days well, we can expect extra help from them on those days. Thomas Kempis (who is not a saint but is a classical spiritual author) teaches that we ought to ask the saints for their intercession with special fervor on their feast days, “About the time of the principal feasts good devotions ought to be renewed and the intercession of the Saints more fervently implored” (The Imitation of Christ, I.19). Continuing this theme, St. Teresa of Avila relates that she received visions from the saints on their feast days. When describing her devotion to St. Clare, and how through her intercession Teresa’s convent was able to practice great poverty, St. Teresa writes: “On her feastday, while I was going to Communion, St. Clare appeared to me with striking beauty. She told me to take courage and to continue on with what I had begun, that she would help me. I became very devoted to her; and what she said has indeed come true, for a nearby monastery of nuns of her order helps sustain us. What is more important is that little by little she brought this desire of mine to such perfection that the poverty the blessed saint practiced in her house is practiced in this one, and we are living on alms. For it had cost me no small amount of trouble that this observance of poverty would have all the backing and authority of the Holy Father behind it so that no one could change it and that there never be any income. And the Lord does more, and it must perhaps be through the prayers of this blessed saint, for without any request His Majesty fully provides what is necessary for us” (The Book of Her Life, chapter 33, 13). The feast day of a saint is thus not merely an important date for us, but it is an important date for them. They are willing and able to help us more than usual on their feast days. This is a great motivation to celebrate their feast days well, because on those dates our prayers to the saints will be especially powerful. In the early Church, a Christian poet Paulinus wrote that he considered his patron saint’s feast fay (St. Felix) to be more important a celebration than his own birthday, “I have always honored [St. Felix’s feast day] in such a way that I would treat it as my own birthday rather than that day on which I was born. . . . Ill-starred the day when I came forth, from evil stock to evil deeds; blessed the day when my protector was born for me to heaven” (Peter Brown, The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity, 57). A saint’s feast day is a very special celebration, especially the feast days of our favorite saints towards whom we have strong devotions. To celebrate them well so that we may grow in holiness we should recall the saint’s virtues and try to imitate them, attend mass devoutly, and ask for the saint’s prayers. The Catholic Church assigns one date out of the year for each and every canonized saint — known as the saint’s feast day. The saints are remembered on their individual feast days with special mention, prayers, and possibly a scripture reading. A saint’s feast day can be the day of their actual death or a day assigned by the Church. Typically, the Church only assigns a day when the day of death is unknown or if several other saints are already assigned to that day. The number of canonized saints, however, is greater than the number of days in a calendar year. So two or more saints often share the same feast day. Because overlap often occurs, and the Church isn’t sure of the date of death of some saints, other calendar dates are sometimes chosen — such as the day that the saint was canonized. Some saints’ feasts are only celebrated in the particular saint’s town or country. Others are internationally celebrated.For example, St. Patrick’s Day, March 17, is celebrated in Ireland, because St. Patrick is the patron saint of the entire nation. St. Patrick’s Day is also celebrated in many areas of the United States due to the Irish immigrants who crossed the Atlantic. Many U.S. dioceses have cathedrals dedicated to St. Patrick, or he’s the patron saint of the diocese. Celebrating the Feast of St. Patrick is a big occasion and a solemnity, a full-blown liturgical feast, in such places. In other places, such as Italy, Spain, France, Poland, and Germany, St. Patrick’s feast day isn’t celebrated with the same fanfare.Another example is St. Joseph’s Day, March 19, which is celebrated in Canada and Europe with more hoopla than in the United States. He’s the patron of the universal Church and the head of the holy family, which refers to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph during the first 30 years of Jesus’ life. Mediterranean people remember him in particular with special foods and festivities, and his day is also a full solemnity all over the world. If his feast day falls on a Friday in Lent, then abstinence from meat and any fasting are dispensed to give the day full recognition. The reason is obvious due to the belief about Joseph’s role in the early life of Jesus: As the husband of Mary and foster father of Jesus, he took care of Mary and Jesus.On some feast days, Catholics process through the streets and host festivals with plenty of pomp and circumstance. And with some feasts, parishes often have a special Mass and may even have a nine-day novena, which usually concludes on the day of the feast itself.In addition, on the feast days of the founders of religious orders, the religious orders that they founded usually honor the feast of their founder with a healthy mix of praying and partying.You can find saints for different places and saints for different occasions. The idea isn’t to replace or diminish the role of Christ as the one sole mediator but to show how the family of faith continues to remain a part of each member in different ways.Page 2Here is a list of ten of the most famous Catholics, beginning with the most famous. But take heed: Just being baptized Catholic doesn't mean a person is a good Catholic. The Catholic Church believes that a good Catholic is one who regularly and faithfully practices his faith every day of his life. A person who dissents from official Catholic teaching on faith and morals, who never or only irregularly attends Mass, or who has a scandalous, immoral lifestyle is not considered a practicing — or a good — Catholic.Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910–1997) Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu was born August 26, 1910, of Albanian ancestry. She was baptized August 27, 1910, in Skopje, Macedonia, and was later known to the world as Mother Teresa of Calcutta.She joined the Sisters of Loreto in 1928, was trained in Dublin, Ireland, and took her final vows in 1937. Known as Sister Teresa at the time of her final vows, she was named headmistress of a middle-class girls' school in Calcutta, India, after some years of teaching history and geography. Later, on a train ride to Darjeeling on September 10, 1946, she said that she had a strong intuition and message from the Lord to work among the poorest of the poor in the world.Probably the most famous Catholic of the 20th century, this nun, who earned the Nobel Peace Prize (1979) and who was only the fourth person in the world to be named honorary citizen of the United States (1996), traveled the world spreading the message of love for the poor — especially the poorest of the poor. Regarded as a modern-day St. Francis of Assisi, Mother Teresa is respected by peoples of all faiths, religions, cultures, and political persuasions. Whether a person was an "untouchable" leper in India or someone dying of AIDS in North America, she saw Christ in those who suffer. She was a true servant of charity to them.Mother Teresa died on September 5, 1997, the same day as Princess Diana's funeral in England. Six years later, Pope John Paul II beatified Mother Teresa on October 19, 2003, with more than 300,000 pilgrims in attendance at Saint Peter's Square, Rome. Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen (1895–1979) Born on May 8, 1895, in El Paso, Illinois, the son of Newton Morris and Delia (Fulton) Sheen was baptized Peter John (P.J.) Sheen. Later, he took the maiden name of his mother and was thereafter known as Fulton J. (John) Sheen. ©Bachrach/Getty Images Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen.Ordained in Peoria on September 20, 1919, Fulton did graduate work at Catholic University of America and then post-graduate studies (PhD) at the University of Louvain, Belgium (1923). He also attended the Sorbonne in Paris and the Angelicum University in Rome, where he earned a doctorate in theology (1924).Pope Pius XI made him a monsignor in 1934, and then he was ordained and consecrated an auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of New York in 1951. Later that same year, Fulton was asked to host a weekly television series, titled Life is Worth Living. The program ran for five seasons — from February 12, 1952, to April 8, 1957 — first on the Dumont Network and then on ABC. And at one point, it beat The Milton Berle Show as number one in the ratings. Fulton exhibited a classy, edified, yet also patriotic and pastoral approach, which helped to erode some deep-seated and hateful anti-Catholic bias prevalent since the days of colonial America. Many famous celebrities, musicians, and politicians owe their conversion to Catholicism to Fulton J. Sheen. Actor Martin Sheen adopted his stage name because of this famous Catholic. He died at the age of 84 on December 9, 1979.Mother Angelica (1923–2016) Rita Antoinette Rizzo was born in Canton, Ohio, on April 20, 1923, the daughter of John Rizzo and Mae Helen Gianfrancesco. Six years later, her parents divorced, and Rita and her mom were on their own. Rita entered the Franciscan Sisters (Poor Clares) of Perpetual Adoration in Cleveland, Ohio, on August 15, 1944, as Sister Mary Angelica of the Annunciation.In 1973, Mother Angelica inaugurated a Catholic book and pamphlet apostolate to spread the faith. But the big stuff was yet to come; Mother Angelica decided to go into television, and on August 15, 1981, the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) was launched, broadcasting four hours a day to 60,000 homes. She reached 1 million homes in less than two years, and in 1987 the network was transmitting 24 hours a day. Today, through EWTN's own satellite, cable, radio, and short-wave broadcasting, 160 million people are reached across 140 countries. (EWTN is also online.) EWTN has become the world's largest and most-watched Catholic network, and Mother Angelica is still very much a part of it.In 1946, Mother Angelica suffered many injuries due to an accident with a floor-buffing machine when she was a novice (a new nun in training who hasn't yet made vows). On January 28, 1998, while she was praying the rosary with an Italian lady she didn't know, she was miraculously cured — her legs and back no longer needed braces or crutches.Mother Angelica suffered a major stroke in 2001 that rendered her speechless. She later became bedridden but had the foresight to relinquish control of the network to a lay private corporation a year before her illness. On March 27, 2016, she died from complications of her condition. Thousands of faithful attended the funeral, and millions watched on EWTN. John F. Kennedy (1917–1963) John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the 35th President of the United States of America, was the first Roman Catholic to hold the highest office in the land.Born in Brookline, Massachusetts, on May 29, 1917, to Joseph P. Kennedy and Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, he was one of nine children in this affluent and influential family. His father was the head of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and later became the Ambassador to Great Britain.John graduated from Harvard in 1940 and a year later enlisted in the U.S. Navy before the attack on Pearl Harbor and the declaration of war. The boat he commanded (PT-109) in the Pacific theater was attacked and sunk by the Japanese. He saved his crew but seriously injured his back. He was discharged in 1945 and ran as a Democrat for the U.S. Congress in 1946. He was re-elected twice.On September 12, 1953, he married Jacqueline Bouvier, who gave him three children (Caroline, 1957; John, Jr., 1960; and a son who died in infancy). He became a U.S. Senator from Massachusetts in 1953. Seven years later, he ran against Vice President Richard M. Nixon and won the presidency. Historians still debate whether John was a devout or practicing Catholic. What's known is that he was the first Catholic to be elected president and that his Catholicism received positive press coverage during his term in office: He, Jackie, and the kids went to Sunday Mass, bishops and cardinals frequented the White House, and an elaborate, solemn, and sad Catholic requiem Mass was said for his funeral following his assassination in November 1963.Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801–1890) One of the most famous converts to Catholicism from England, he was initially an Anglican priest and pastor of St. Mary's Church, Oxford, England. Here he ministered to countless university students. It was his studies of the Early Church Fathers that lead to his intellectual conversion, which resulted in his conversion to Catholicism. Newman was famous for his long sermons that he delivered at St. Mary's Anglican Church. He joined and was instrumental in the Oxford Movement, a grassroots effort to restore certain Catholic elements of worship so as to reinvigorate the Anglican Church. The deeper he studied and prayed, the more he came to the conclusion that conversion to the Catholic Church was not an option for him but a necessity.He was received in the Catholic Church in 1845 and ordained a Catholic Priest in 1847. This resulted in his being ostracized by the Anglican community, Oxford University, and many of his intellectual friends. He established the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, Birmingham, England, and continued to write and publish works on apologetics, all while establishing a Catholic University in Dublin and a school in Birmingham.As an Anglican in Oxford, Newman ministered to the intellectual elite. In Birmingham, he served the poor Irish immigrants. Pope Leo XIII promoted him to Cardinal in 1849. After his death, about a century later, during the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to England, Newman was beatified on September 19, 2010. He is considered a genius and at the same time a humble pastor. Bishop John Carroll (1735–1815) Carroll was the third son of Daniel Carroll and Eleanor Darnall. In 1753 he entered to the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) and was ordained a priest in 1769. After the Jesuit order was suppressed temporarily (1773–1814), Fr. Carroll returned to Maryland, only to find strict anti-Catholic laws and no parish assignment.In 1776 the Continental Congress asked Carroll to go to Quebec and persuade the French Canadians to help the American Revolution. He was able to influence some of the founding fathers to prohibit discrimination against religion in the Constitution. Only four states ratified this in the beginning: Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Delaware. Years later (1791), religious liberty would be enshrined as the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights.Pope Pius VI appointed him the first bishop of Baltimore (1789), the very first diocese of the United States of America. He battled anti-Catholicism throughout his life and showed personally that Catholics, especially clergy, could and should be patriotic citizens while still being faithful to their religion. Archbishop Carroll encouraged St. Elizabeth Ann Seton to move from New York to Baltimore and then later to Emmitsburg, Maryland, where she established the Sisters of Charity (now the Daughters of Charity). With his blessing and support, she established the foundation of the Catholic (parochial) school system in the United States. John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892–1973) J.R.R. Tolkien, author of The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit, was born in South Africa in 1892, but after his father died four years later, he and his mother and younger brother, Hilary, moved to England. There, his aunt and mother converted to Catholicism, which annoyed both sides of the family. Ronald (as he was known then) and his brother, however, embraced the Roman Catholic religion. A contemporary and close friend of C.S. Lewis, the author of the Chronicles of Narnia and the Screwtape Letters, Tolkien learned to use fantasy writing to strategically but subtly convey Catholic values while retaining imagination and excitement in his works. Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874–1936) Born in London in 1874, G. K. Chesterton was baptized in the Church of England. Surprisingly, he wrote many of his famous Father Brown mysteries before joining the Roman Catholic Church in 1922. Those mysteries tell of a quiet, unassuming priest who solves mysteries like Sherlock Holmes, Lord Peter Wimsey, or Hercule Poirot. Ironically, this author didn't learn to read until he was 8 years old, but he would eventually be a prolific and scholarly author of 17 nonfiction books, 9 fiction books, and numerous essays and poems. His book Orthodoxy remains a classic for Catholic apologists — people who defend Catholicism through the use of logic, reason, and debate — and for literary critics alike. Dorothy Day (1897–1980) Dorothy Day converted to Catholicism in 1927. A writer and social activist, she hobnobbed with the literary and social elite prior to her conversion. Dorothy wrote for several socialist and progressive publications in the 1910s and 1920s. She had an affair, an abortion, and a child out of wedlock before giving herself over to Jesus and converting to the Catholic Church. She became Catholic through an encounter with a Sister of Charity, who helped baptize both her and her daughter.She founded the Catholic Worker movement along with former Christian Brother, Peter Maurin. Day edited and wrote in the Catholic Worker, a newspaper that promoted the social teachings of the Catholic Church, and refuted the Communist paper, the Daily Worker. She was a die-hard pacifist, which made her unpopular during World War II. Many individual Catholics and Catholic institutions (schools, hospitals, and so on) banned her newspaper. Dorothy Day tangled with Cardinal Spellman of New York when he tried to break the gravedigger strike of 1949 by sending seminarians as replacements, or scabs (the incident is described in detail in a 1998 Fordham Urban Law Journal article by David L. Gregory).She lived a radical view of the Gospel in showing concern and commitment to the poor, the disenfranchised, and the marginalized. Most of all, however, she was a woman of deep faith and conviction as well as service to those in need. Day has the title of Servant of God, which is the first step in possible beatification and canonization in the Catholic Church. Father Benedict Groeschel, CFR (1933–2014) Born Peter Groeschel in Jersey City, New Jersey, he was the oldest of six children. He entered the Capuchin Franciscan Friars in 1951 and took the name Benedict. In 1959 he was ordained a priest and later earned a doctorate in psychology from Columbia University. Father Benedict served as chaplain to emotionally disturbed children and taught at several Catholic universities and seminaries, including Fordham and Saint Joseph Seminary, Dunwoodie. He also founded Trinity Retreat Center, used by many priests. Author of many books on spirituality, Groeschel also hosted numerous television series for EWTN (Catholic TV network).Groeschel and seven other Capuchins formed a new religious community called the Congregation of the Fran