

## Holy Days of Obligation

The holy days of obligation for Latin Rite Catholics are indicated in canon 1246 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law:

Can. 1246. §1. Sunday, on which by apostolic tradition the paschal mystery is celebrated, must be observed in the universal Church as the primordial holy day of obligation. The following days must also be observed: the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Epiphany, the Ascension, the Body and Blood of Christ, Holy Mary the Mother of God, her Immaculate Conception, her Assumption, Saint Joseph, Saint Peter and Saint Paul the Apostles, and All Saints. §2. With the prior approval of the Apostolic See, however, the conference of bishops can suppress some of the holy days of obligation or transfer them to a Sunday.

Can. 1246. §2. [...] The conference of bishops can abolish certain holy days of obligation or transfer them to a Sunday with prior approval of the Apostolic See.

Placed in the order of the [liturgical calendar](#), the ten days (apart from Sundays) that canon 1246 mentions are:

- **December 8:** [Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary](#)
- **December 25:** [Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord](#) (Christmas)
- **January 1:** [Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God](#)
- 6 January: [Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord](#)
- 19 March: [Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary](#)
- **Thursday of the sixth week of Eastertide:** [Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord](#)
- Thursday after Trinity Sunday: [Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ](#) (Feast of Corpus Christi)
- June 29: [Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles](#)
- **August 15:** [Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary](#)
- **November 1:** [Solemnity of All Saints](#)

The Holy Days of Obligation observed in the United States are bolded above. Whenever January 1, the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, or August 15, the solemnity of the Assumption, or November 1, the solemnity of All Saints, falls on a Saturday or on a Monday, the precept to attend Mass is abrogated. The solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord may be transferred from Thursday of the Sixth Week of Easter to the Seventh Sunday of Easter.

### **The Immaculate Conception (December 8<sup>th</sup>)**

The *Immaculate Conception* is the celebration of Mary's preservation by God from the transmission of original sin at the time of her own conception, which allowed her to live a life completely free from sin. *It is not, as is popularly believed, another name for the doctrine of the virgin birth.* The Immaculate Conception was defined as a dogma by Pope Pius IX in his constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*, published December 8, 1854 (the Feast of the Immaculate Conception).

### **Christmas (December 25<sup>th</sup>)**

Christmas (literally meaning the 'mass of Christ') celebrates the nativity of Jesus. The actual date of Jesus' birth and is very much debated by scholars today. During the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord we celebrate the Incarnation. Preceding the feast day is a season of

penitence known as Advent, which lasts for four weeks. The liturgical season of Christmas follows beginning on Christmas Day and ending on the Baptism of our Lord.

### **Mary, Mother of God (January 1<sup>st</sup>)**

*Mary* is the mother of Jesus Christ and the betrothed of Joseph. We say therefore that Mary is the Mother of God and we proclaim the unity of Christ's two natures: he is both God and man. The Son of God existed before all time, as the eternally begotten of the Father. The union of the two natures in Christ did not occur until his conception in St. Mary's womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth affirmed the divine presence in St. Mary by saying "Who am I that the Mother of my Lord should visit me?" In his own way, St. John the Baptist also affirmed the divine presence by leaping inside Elizabeth's womb. **Epiphany (January 6<sup>th</sup>)**

*Epiphany* is a feast that celebrates the 'shining forth' or revelation of God to mankind in human form, in the person of Jesus Christ. We celebrate it today as the visit from the East of the three Magi (Casper, Melchior, and Balthazar) in Bethlehem. The observance originally included the birth of Jesus Christ; the visit of the three Magi; and all of Jesus' childhood events, up to his baptism in the Jordan by John the Baptist. The feast was initially based on, and viewed as a fulfillment of, the Jewish Feast of Lights. This was fixed on January 6. The eastern churches treated January 6 as the day marking Jesus' birth, while in the western church, based in Rome, December 25<sup>th</sup> was marked as the day marking Jesus' birth. In the later half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the Eastern and Western churches adopted each other's festivals. This has given rise in the west to the notion of a twelve day festival, starting on December 25, and ending on January 6, called the twelve days of Christmas, although some Christian cultures - especially those of Latin America - extend it to forty days, ending on Candlemas, or February 2 (known as Candelaria in Spanish).

### **Saint Joseph (March 19<sup>th</sup>)**

*Joseph the Betrothed* (also referred to as *Joseph of Nazareth*) was the foster-father of Jesus Christ. Not much is known of Joseph except that he was "of the House of David" and lived in the town of Nazareth. He is the patron saint of workers and has several feast days. He was betrothed to the Virgin Mary at the time that Mary conceived Jesus. Luke says that he lived at Nazareth in Galilee (Luke 2:4); however, according to Matthew, it was only after the return from Egypt that he settled in Nazareth (Matthew 2:23). He is called a "just man." He was by trade a carpenter (Matthew 13:55).

### **Saint Peter and Paul (June 29<sup>th</sup>)**

It is appropriate that these two figures are celebrated on the same day as many times they are compared and contrasted in their differences and similarities of theology and their lives.

*Saint Peter* was one of the Twelve Apostles. His original name was *Simon*. Peter, who became the first bishop of Antioch and later bishop of Rome, "was the rock upon which Christ would build his Church."

*Saint Paul of Tarsus* (originally *Saul of Tarsus*) or *St. Paul the Apostle* is said to be the most important disciple of Jesus. Paul did much to advance Christianity among the gentiles, and as an author is considered one of the primary sources of the early Church.

### **The Assumption of Mary (August 15<sup>th</sup>)**

The body of Mary, the mother of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, was taken into Heaven along with her soul after her death. Mary's passage into heaven is called the *Assumption of Mary*. "Since the church understands death to be a consequence of the first sin and believes that Mary

was born without original sin, some theologians have wondered if Mary died of simply was assumed into heaven without dying. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* doesn't answer the question, but says, 'The Most Blessed Virgin Mary, when the course of her earthly life was completed, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven...' (CCC #974, #966)." (Klein, Rev. Peter. *The Catholic Source Book, Third Ed.* Orlando: BROWN-ROA, 2000. See p. 352).

### **All Saints Day (November 1<sup>st</sup>)**

The festival of All Saints, also formerly known as "All Hallows," or "Hallowmas," is a feast celebrated in honor of all the saints and martyrs, known or unknown. It is a festival of the first rank, with a vigil and an octave. (The origin of the festival of All Saints as celebrated in the West is on May 13 in either 609 or 610). Pope Boniface IV consecrated the Pantheon at Rome to the Blessed Virgin and all the martyrs. The feast of the *dedicatio Sanctae Mariae ad Martyres* has been celebrated at Rome ever since. The chosen day, May 13, was a pagan observation of great antiquity, the culmination of three days of the Feast of the Lemures, in which alleviated the malevolent and restless spirits of all the dead. The modern placement of the feast of All Saints on November 1st is now traced to the foundation by Pope Gregory III (731-741) of an oratory (small chapel) in St Peter's for the relics "of the holy apostles and of all saints, martyrs and confessors, of all the just made perfect who are at rest throughout the world."

### **The Ascension (40 days after Easter)**

The *Ascension* is one of the great feasts in the liturgical calendar, and commemorates the Ascension of Jesus Christ being taken up into Heaven forty days after His resurrection from the dead. We celebrate his return to the Father in heaven and his sending the power of the Holy Spirit upon his Church. The event is recorded in the New Testament in Acts Chapter 1. Ascension Day is always a Thursday; in some churches (especially in the United States) it is commemorated on the subsequent Sunday (the Sunday before Pentecost).

### **Corpus Christi (60 days after Easter)**

*Corpus Christi* means *Body of Christ* in Latin. It is a moveable feast celebrated by Catholics on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday (eighth Sunday after Easter), i.e. 60 days after Easter, in order to commemorate the institution of the Holy Eucharist. Jesus Christ is truly present under the appearance of bread and wine. He responds to the natural craving of the human heart after a food which nourishes unto immortality (a craving also expressed in many pagan religions), by dispensing to mankind His own Flesh and Blood. The day is a national holiday in some Catholic countries.

#### *Websites used:*

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy\\_day\\_of\\_obligation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_day_of_obligation)<https://www.usccb.org/committees/canonical-affairs-church-governance/complementary-norms#tab--canon-1246-%C2%A72-holy-days-of-obligation>