

ultimate goal of all human striving. This goal is nothing less than the perfect possession of God Himself in the loving knowledge of the Beatific Vision. And Christ, the most practical of moralists because His practice is creative, also gave us both the means and the capability for achieving the Reality infinitely beyond our natures. His is the account of "the Wise" which so often is at odds with that of "the many" concerning the nature of true happiness. For when men leave God, they seek out other gods of their own idolatrous and blasphemous devisings: the struggle for power, for money, for the passing pleasure of the flesh. It is to Albert Camus' credit that he saw through the sham gods that his contemporaries had set up for worship. He did not know the true End of human endeavor; he was unable to settle within his heart the problem of an All-good God who permits human suffering; he was, as one critic called him, "a Pascal without Christ." But for all the difficulties in which he found himself, for all the hypocrisy he witnessed in his own generation, for all the pressures of intellectual charlatanism that hounded him in his lonely stand for value in human life, he had the honesty to proclaim to all men that the beginning of their happiness would come when each told "the other that he is not God." We cannot blame him too much for confusing the pursuit with happiness. For although he would not admit it, Albert Camus passionately desired the true means, honestly sought the true path that is pointed out by the Christian revelation. For all the errors in his work, he yet diagnosed the terrible disease of the times. Perhaps his courage and integrity will give those who follow him the initiative and strength to apply the remedy.

—Thomas Marcellus Coskren, O.P.

## THE LITURGICAL CYCLE

EVERY YEAR thousands of people gather in New York's Times Square to ring out the old and welcome in the new year. Excitement runs high as the last few minutes of the dying year ebb away from the shore of human events and then, as the neon sign flashes out its gaudy colors, a new year is born. For all people a new year has some special meaning. It may be a source of new found hope and joy; it may herald days of decision and conflict; for all it begins a time of challenge. A new

year is another great step forward in man's unending quest for new social, intellectual and spiritual advancement. The plan of nature unfolds again its awesome mystery; the newness of spring, the peacefulness of summer, the darkness of winter and the dying of autumn. The purposeful order of God's plan remains stable.

Man, in imitation of this order, has established the calendar with its days, weeks, months and years. He has used it as an accurate record for the plan of history. The plan of daily living, the demands of industry, the operations of the economy revolve around the year and its divisions. Holy Mother the Church has not ignored this manufactured order and has incorporated the calendar into her daily life of worship. From the days of her infancy, when pious pilgrims first began to visit the tombs of the early martyrs and virgins, to the present elaborate computation of different feasts and festivals, the Church has used the calendar in her liturgy as a means of bringing home to the faithful the message of doctrine, grace and sanctity. The world still groans for Redemption and one way in which the divine plan of salvation is offered to us, one way in which the road to Christian perfection is pointed out for us is through the annual unfolding of the mysteries by means of the Liturgical Cycle. How well this was expressed in the great encyclical *Mediator Dei* of the late Holy Father:

"The Liturgical Year, devotedly fostered and accompanied by the Church, is not a cold and lifeless representation of events of the past, or a single and bare record of a former age. It is rather Christ Himself who is ever living in His Church."

To any Catholic familiar with the Missal, the arrangement of the different Church feasts is taken more or less for granted. The greater festivals are seen as the bright suns of the entire liturgical calendar with the days dedicated to the particular Saints clustered around them. This division into the Temporal and Sanctoral Cycles, as they are called, is the result of historical evolutions although the great feasts of Our Lord have remained fairly constant. However, as with many things that have become familiar to us, a certain loss of perspective may creep into our view of the Liturgical calendar. The beauty, utility and unity of the liturgical year must therefore be given our consideration. We must realize that the liturgy and the liturgical year is Christ living today through the sacrificial altar and worship of His Church. The end product of this mystery-presentation is a drama far surpassing any stage or screen spectacular.

Over nineteen hundred years ago in a small town called Bethlehem, a Child was born. The reality of this Child's life has been perpetuated

through the ages by means of the living and dynamic medium of the Sacred Liturgy. Consider any of the great mysteries of our faith—the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Passion and Death of Our Lord—all of them have retained their original vigor in our devotion because of the life-full activity of the liturgy. The anniversaries have been kept alive; the faithful are ever filled with their life-giving grace and richness. Year in and year out we have a never ending remembrance of the great work and word of God Almighty. As in the beautiful Rosary of Our Lady, the liturgy contains all the great moments of Christian doctrine. The Church has taken them and recorded them and even done more by placing upon them her infallible stamp of approval. If we are to better understand the liturgy, if we are to share more in the great plan of Redemption, we must have an intelligent grasp of the master plan of worship—the annual liturgical cycle.

Without the guiding agent of the liturgical cycle, the feasts could have fallen into single entities isolated from any master plan of unity. The unfolding of the plan of Redemption could have become departmentalized and the Christian world robbed of a great potential storehouse of spirituality. Keeping in mind the fundamental unity of the liturgy, stemming from the one Christ, we shall examine some of the basic structure patterns of this great map of life. For it is in the Liturgy that the one Christ has communicated to His Mystical Body one of the great well-springs of salvation.

Birth naturally connotes beginning. The mystery of birth has puzzled and intrigued men of all ages and the joy of parents at the first glimpse of their new born baby is one difficult to reproduce. The note of beginning, therefore, in the liturgical year has traditionally been celebrated by the birth of Christ in the manger. Advent sets the preparatory tone for most of the liturgical concepts of the birth of Christ. The world was dead, buried in the darkness of sin, and then the Babe of Life and Holiness was born and there appeared on the face of the earth for the first time a new hope in the life of man's redemption.

Following the liturgical master plan we next encounter the Saviour as He is subjected to the prescriptions of the ancient law of circumcision. This first shedding of the Precious Blood is followed by the manifestation of the new born King to the rest of the world. After the Purification and the Presentation we lose Him in the Liturgy as we lose Him in the Scriptures. We must, therefore, be content with His going down and being subject to parental authority. Out of the obscurity of this submission, there

appears on the liturgical horizon the first dim glimmer of the light of Easter. The boy has matured and we with Him. We have left the calm and peace of that first Christmas night. We have passed from the quiet of the hillside town of His childhood and we find ourselves on the brink of a noisy, confused and rebellious world. Through the liturgy we are at the threshold of the ever present *now* of the worship life of the Church.

The sacramental character of the Church year is of the essence of worship. Without the Mass and unceasing administration of the sacraments there would not be a liturgical cycle. Just as the four seasons are annually witnesses to the laws of nature, so also the liturgical year graphically describes for us the progress of supernatural life moving in the great ocean of Divine grace. With this in mind, we see that the stage is set for the unfolding of the greatest drama of all times. The liturgical cycle has become quiet and somewhat somber during the days before *Septuagesima*. It is shattered by the final bursting forth of the great terminal *Alleluia*. As the last faint sound of the chant fades into the distance, the light goes out and we find ourselves in the time of penance and preparation. This time we are not expecting the great joy of the Birth of Christ but rather we are at the real beginning of things and not just a hopeful expectation. We have reached rock bottom and only do we begin to rise with the study of the great men of the Old Testament. In the breviary and in the Mass, we once again meet with Abraham, Moses, Noe. By opening the great books of Genesis we are at the inception of the long road that will culminate in the glory and brightness of Easter Sunday morning.

As in the spiritual life where we must go through the different stages of purification before we are privileged to enjoy the illumination of true friendship with God, the Paschal joy also demands this liturgical preparation of mind and body by spiritual purgation. After the brief introduction in which we realize our calling, we are ready to see in living action the restoration of the great divine life in the hearts and minds of all mankind. It is a time when we are to be molded by the inspiration and promptings of the Holy Spirit. We are given a foretaste of that true illumination of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

With the appearance of purple vestments, the faithful are able to recognize that the Church has begun the Holy Season of Lent. Having been introduced by the three previous Sundays of Pre-Lent, we now find ourselves in the season of penance and mortification. It is the real time of purification and spiritual rejuvenation. We re-read and re-evaluate the struggles Our Saviour had with Satan and we place ourselves in His place.

We are also in the open conflict and on the battlefield at a time when the days of a cold war are no more. Either we are with Him or we are against Him. The liturgical cycle makes all this more vivid. Passiontide ushers in the true consideration and reflection on the Passion and suffering of the Divine Saviour. As in all drama we are looking for the climax. We soon find ourselves with the ancient Jews and join with them in the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem. It is as if we can hear the ring of those ancient cries of praise to the King as He slowly rides into the city. By reason of our liturgical knowledge we can also hear in the distance the ring of the nails as they are pounded into His flesh. The institution of the Eucharist, the three terrible hours of physical and mental torture, the ignominious death of the cross—all seem to place a finality to the liturgy that is indeed devastating. Yet we are then thrown into the middle world of Holy Saturday, the day of emptiness and uncertainty. And then all is again restored through the beauty and life of the Vigil of the Feast of Feasts. The Light of Christ, the life-giving soul of the Church, once again begins to shine forth in the hearts of mankind. All creation shares in this birth of grace as the Saviour is ready to accomplish the proof of all His previous teaching. It is truly the climax, the summit, the apex of the Church's Year of grace.

Like Mary Magdalene we come to the tomb and find it empty. We receive the commission from the angel to tell the rest of the world the glory of the miracle. The God who died on Friday and who on Sunday, by His own Divine Power, rose from the dead has given living proof to the claims of the past thirty-three years of His life. At this wonderful feast of Easter, we have come to the height of grace and life. Even Christmas with its association of joy and light is somewhat overshadowed by the fact that there were some who did in reality greet His birth with rejection. But now on Easter, the light has come back to remain forever in the world. If we examine the texts of the post-Easter Mass formulae, we will see and understand why the Church has placed the six apparitions of the Risen Saviour in this particular section of the sacrificial cycle. They are found there because they are a living proof of the veracity of the Resurrection. If the Easter liturgy is viewed in this manner how much more will the final words of Our Lord mean to us, "I am with you all days. . . ."

The liturgical year as it unfolds its beautiful lessons in the mysteries, not only makes good use of texts but also employs, for the faithful to enable themselves to remain in living contact with the particular mystery, certain material objects and symbols. For Easter she has given us the

Paschal Candle with its magnificent blessing and rich symbolic meaning. It remains in the sanctuaries of our churches during the Paschal Season as a constant liturgical reminder to us of the great things that we witnessed on that wonderful Sunday. It is as if we had the Glorified Saviour Himself shining forth in our midst. However, after living in this light of Christ for forty days, we now realize that there is more to understand. It is time for the Saviour to return to His Heavenly Father. As the light of the Paschal candle disappears from our churches, Our Lord completes His work on this earth. This is a time of joy and not sadness. As we read in the Preface, "Who was lifted up into heaven so that He might make us partakers of His divinity." If the feast of the Ascension is not seen in relation and in close unity with the preceding Lent and Easter then we are missing the greatest lesson the liturgy is capable of teaching us. In silent and aweful meditation, we join ourselves to the watching Apostles and witness the physical termination of Our Lord's life on this earth.

After the drama and pathos of Easter and the Ascension, it would seem almost impossible for the Church to reach yet another climax. However, this is exactly what happens. The feast of Pentecost—from the Greek word *pentekoste*, the fiftieth day—is the second climax. It is the final stamp of the Church on the great feast of Easter. Seen in its liturgical context, Pentecost has double meaning and signification for us. It brings to fruit the seeds of the new formed faith and makes the Apostles and ourselves true and active missionaries. If we fail to obtain from this feast the concept of the Holy Spirit inspiring us to go forth and preach the word of God then this rich feast has become useless to us and our liturgical life. The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity has ascended into heaven and the Divine Spirit remains with us to direct and guide the destinies of the Church.

We have now, for all practical purposes, finished the Easter Cycle of the Church's year. The twenty-four or more Sundays after Pentecost are in some way the shadow and reflection of Easter. To this area of feasts we must see the same note of unity and relation that permeates all the other sections of the cycle. We must form ourselves in a oneness of spirit to the texts of this time and bring to the fore certain basic and particular notes from the life of Christ. We must make the miracles, the teaching on His Kingdom, the Parousia meaningful in our own daily lives.

As we have said before, the liturgical year has borrowed from that of the civil calendar and in particular with reference to the changes of season. With the natural transition of the long summer days to those shorter ones

of the fall, the Church begins to make her own transition. The pendulum begins to swing back and we find ourselves in the last stage of our unified liturgical year. Yet we have no particular feast to celebrate the end of the cycle. This would follow from what we have stressed. The liturgical change of seasons is ever new and ever vibrant. It is a living thing that continuously re-tells the entire gamut of great mysteries. With the mechanical and yet real help of the liturgical cycle, we again begin the study and the more important living, of the great truths of our religion.

To those familiar with the structure of the missal and the breviary, it is obvious that no mention has been made of the so-called Sanctoral Cycle of the Church's year. We have been concerned with Christ's birth, maturing, manhood and final fruition by means of the Temporal Cycle. We have seen the great points of doctrine and dogma that pivot around these centrally located festivals. However, another vast and varied storehouse of rich spirituality and liturgical piety may be found in the feasts of the different Saints. There have been many excellent studies in this field and the consensus of opinion seems to conclude to some mode of classification that will retain and bring home to the faithful the same unity as we have discovered in the other cycle. The problem of how to present this section of the year in a paper of this scope is insoluble. May we, however, confine our remarks to a few points for your consideration.

The Saints that we meet in the time after the feast of Christmas are well chosen to give us an adequate picture of the witness role of the Christian to the new Born King. Saint Stephen, the Proto-Martyr, Saint John the Evangelist, the massacre of the Holy Innocents—all have this note of unity. All are different types in the Mystical Body and all have a message for us which we can only learn from the continuity of the entire year. After the feast of Easter, there appears another grouping of feasts that have rich import for us. We find a superabundance of feasts dedicated to those who gave their lives for the preservation of the doctrine of the Risen Christ. Just as He proved to the world the worth of His own teaching and love, these countless men and women likewise prove to the world their belief and love for the same teaching. It should offer us a tremendous incentive to better realize that with Him we can do all things.

A study in the Liturgical Cycle, no matter how much of a survey it is, would not be complete if mention were not made of Marian Liturgy. Unique in her role in the Redemptive act, she is also unique in her role in the liturgy. She is present both at the great events commemorated in the life of her Son and she also appears under special personal titles. Standing

out as the *mulier fortis* of the Old Testament, she guides the way for us during the year with her simplicity and holiness. Her Divine Maternity, the powerfulness of her Immaculate Conception, the glory of her Assumption, the majesty of her Queenship, the well-spring of her Holy Rosary—are just a few in the long litany of Marian liturgical celebrations. If we are to see the oneness of the liturgy and if we are to deepen our love and appreciation for the mysteries of the Catholic Church, we must see them in some relation to this Divine Mother. She may, therefore, rightly be called the Queen of the Liturgy and the Protectress of the Liturgical Year.

Having seen the unity of the Temporal Cycle and a brief inroad into some notions on the feasts of the saints, we can see the need for a deeper penetration into the structure and meaning of all parts of the divine liturgy of the Catholic Church. We can see what the different days and truths should mean to us in the realm of every day living. If we can grasp some of the power that we have in the liturgical cycle, we can see the benefit that we will be able to give to all fellow members of the Mystical Body. The world will witness a new revival and re-birth of love and brotherhood. The answer is found by making this ever new and ever vibrant life of liturgy a part of our daily living. Man must make Christ his center and not just a neat little sub-compartment. If we try to live and love the annual liturgical unfolding of the year's feast by integrating it with our interior life, we will end by finding a taste of the joy and peace of eternal life.

—Anselm M. Egan, O.P.

## **WE SHALL ALL WAIT AT MAGEDDO**

*As you join battle today with your enemies there must be no faint hearts among you, no flinching, no yielding, no trembling here. . . . Is there anyone here whose spirits are daunted by terror? Let him go back home, or he will daunt the spirits of his brethren, and make them cowards too (Dt. 20:3, 8).*

**J**OSIAS had deployed his men in the path of the Egyptian armies. He was waiting at Mageddo to fight them and halt their advance north along the fertile crescent.

Josias was king of Juda. The year was 609 B.C. The small Southern Kingdom of David and Solomon. The people of this remaining glory of