

Tridentine Community News

January 25, 2009

Octaves

By now, you have likely heard the term “Octave” used with regards to a Feast in the Church Calendar. Let’s examine what Octaves are.

Holy Mother Church desires that we commemorate the most solemn Feasts of the year not only on the day of the Feast itself, but also for a total of eight days. The most famous Octave in the calendar is that of Easter. Indeed, officially, Easter is the only Octave preserved in the Ordinary Form. In the Extraordinary Form, the 1955 Calendar reform suppressed all Octaves except Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. However, because the Calendar itself was mostly untouched, the other Octaves of Epiphany, Ascension, Corpus Christi, and Sacred Heart are still in place, even if not by name. During an Octave, certain things may be kept constant: For example, throughout the Octave of the Nativity, both a special Preface of the Nativity and a special *Communicantes* in the Canon are used. This liturgical continuity has the effect of reminding us about the Feast for all eight days.

Ember Days

A feature of the Tridentine calendar that is often overlooked nowadays is the four seasonal sets of Ember Days. These are a Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday of one week on which the Church calls for prayer in thanksgiving for the gifts of the earth. The old Canon Law called for fasting on Ember Days. Ember Days are observed on the weeks after December 13 (Feast of St. Lucy), the First Sunday of Lent, Pentecost, and September 14 (Exaltation of the Holy Cross).

When the Calendar was revised in 1969, Ember Days were not officially discarded, but were relegated to be decided upon by national Bishops’ Conferences. Unfortunately, they seem to have been forgotten in Canada and the U.S., perhaps because the concurrent relaxing of the fasting laws made their non-observance no longer a mortal sin. Fasting laws are matters of Canon Law, not Liturgical Law, and thus will be aligned with the Ordinary Form Calendar for the foreseeable future.

Rogation Days

Similar to Ember Days, Rogation Days occur on April 25 (Feast of St. Mark the Evangelist), and the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before the Feast of the Ascension. They are days of prayer of appeasement of God’s anger, for protection against natural calamities, and in petition for a plentiful harvest. A procession is traditionally held on April 25. Fasting was not required in recent times.

Regional and Secondary Feast Days

Some feast days pertain only to a region or to a particular religious congregation. For example, August 11 is the Commemoration of St. Tiburtius and Feast of St. Susanna in the Universal Calendar. In certain dioceses of the United States, the Feast of St. Philomena may also be celebrated that day, using the Common Mass of a Virgin Martyr.

Lesser-known saints may not appear in any official Calendar, but are still assigned Feast Days. For instance, May 15 is the Feast of St. John Baptist de la Salle in the Universal Calendar, but is also the Feast of St. Dymphna. Though we cannot find any specific

reference, logic would tell us that like St. Philomena, her Mass would be the Common of a Virgin Martyr.

On July 4, the Archdiocese of Detroit (alone) celebrates the Dedication of the Consecrated Churches using the Mass for the Dedication of a Church. On August 15, the Diocese of

London, Ontario celebrates the Anniversary of Episcopal Consecration of Bishop Ronald Fabbro via a Commemorative Collect after the Collect of the Mass of the Feast of the Assumption (a First Class Feast which cannot be displaced).

Living a Liturgical Life Via the Calendar

Taking all of the components as a whole – Feast Days, Octaves, Ember Days, Rogation Days, plus the recalling of our Lord’s life, death, resurrection, and ascension – the Extraordinary Form Calendar is a treasury of flow, form, and function.

With the de-emphasis on constructs in the Ordinary Form Calendar, it is easy not to think too much about the Liturgical Year, aside from perhaps the saint of the day. But with some study, one comes to learn and appreciate that the Extraordinary Form Calendar has *structure* and a *systematicness* to it that the Ordinary Form has lost in its attempt to simplify and make room for more saints. We believe that more saints can be added to the Extraordinary Form Calendar without losing this architecture.

The liturgical colors of the chalice veils, altar missal stand veils, and elaborate vestments that are common sights at Tridentine Masses help emphasize the role of the Calendar. Various sacramentals and rituals – Epiphany Water and Chalk in January, the Corpus Christi procession, Brown Scapulars in July, etc. – also make vivid the role of the Calendar, and we therefore make use of those traditional practices here.

In summary, Holy Mother Church wants us to integrate her Calendar into our daily lives and thoughts. Those of use blessed to follow the Extraordinary Form are provided with the tools to do just that, and thus keep our faith at the forefront of our thoughts, every day of the week.

