

5 **TIME: NOT ONLY SCARCE, BUT SACRED**

All human societies have ways of marking the passing of time. Our lives are marked by the rising and setting of the sun and the passing of seasons. While we often pay attention to the passing minutes, hours and days, how often do you pay attention to sacred time?

Keeping time and celebrating the harvest, seasons, births, etc. is not only important to our secular senses, but crucial to our sacramental imaginations. The Church marks its time by the liturgical year, by which the Church provides us with a way to ponder the greatest mysteries of our faith: the Incarnation, the Paschal Mystery, the outpouring of the Spirit, and the Second Coming of Christ. Along the way we remember the Saints and commemorate feasts and fasts to celebrate our redemption in Christ.

The Church marks time in the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Triduum, and Ordinary Time. The liturgical year, like a sacrament, mediates or reveals God's ongoing activity in the world. Briefly, we will explore the major seasons.

The year begins with Advent, the season of preparation. We prepare for the light which comes into the world, both in Christ's birth, and in his return in glory. Christmas commemorates not only the historical birth of Christ, but also Christ's continual birth within us and in the world, which will eventually usher in the fullness of God's kingdom.

Lent is the Church's great retreat, a time to slow down and examine our brokenness, which leads us to accept God's free gift of mercy. These 40 days lead us to the greatest of all celebrations: the Easter Vigil. By uniting our own suffering to Christ, we are transformed and rise anew with Christ. During the 50 days of Easter, the Church shouts "Alleluia" and rejoices in Christ's victory over death. This season of feasting ends with Pentecost, the day the Holy Spirit was poured out on all creation and the Church is commissioned to proclaim the good news to all peoples. The rest of the year is taken up with this work of the Church, as we tell the stories and await Christ's return in glory. The readings for the end of ordinary time focus us on his return, and culminate in the feast of Christ the King, when the whole cycle begins again.

Each year we retell the stories, prepare ourselves, and announce the good news of Christ. The Church's stories seem to be mirrored in the world around us: the coming light announced in the darkness, the return of God's favor to the land that has been frozen, and the harvest of all things when they have reached their time. And in it all, we say: Jesus is Lord. Lord, come quickly!

