THE DAILY BREAD

The Acts of the Apostles



The Liturgical Year

A FORMATION BOOK BY

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The Everyday Apostle

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Living It Out

The Liturgical Year

Living by the Church's Calendar, Not the World's

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INTRODUCTION

The Two Calendars

Every man lives by a calendar, whether he thinks about it or not. The calendar tells him what time it is in the larger sense, what season of the year he is in, what is coming, what to prepare for, what to celebrate. And the calendar forms him, quietly and powerfully, because the rhythm of a man's year shapes the rhythm of his soul. The question is not whether a man will live by a calendar; he will. The question is which calendar.

Most Catholic men live, without ever deciding to, by the secular calendar, the calendar of the surrounding culture. Its seasons are the commercial and civic ones: the shopping seasons, the sports seasons, the tax season, the vacation season, the long slog of ordinary weeks punctuated by the holidays the culture keeps. This calendar has its own rhythm and its own values, and it forms the men who live by it, teaching them, week by week, what to anticipate and what to celebrate, orienting their year around consumption, achievement, and leisure. And most Catholic men live by it almost entirely, their year shaped by the culture's calendar, with a few religious observances, Christmas and Easter mainly, folded into it as occasional interruptions.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. — Ecclesiastes 3:1

But there is another calendar, older and deeper, and it belongs to the Catholic by right: the liturgical year, the Church's own calendar, which structures time not around commerce and civic life but around the mysteries of Jesus Christ. It has its own seasons, Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter, the long stretches of Ordinary Time; its own rhythm of fasting and feasting, penance and rejoicing, waiting and celebration; its own great days, the solemnities and feasts and the countless saints who fill the year. And it forms the men who live by it in an entirely different direction than the secular calendar does, orienting their whole year around Christ, teaching them to anticipate his coming, to walk his passion, to celebrate his resurrection, to live the whole of their time within the great story of salvation.

Most Catholics treat this calendar as decoration, a bit of religious color added to a year lived essentially by the world's calendar. This book is written to change that, to show that the liturgical year is not decoration but a way of life, a whole calendar meant to be lived, with hidden practical depth that transforms a man's experience of time and forms him profoundly. We will see what the liturgical year is and why it matters. We will walk

through its seasons, understanding what each is for and how to live it. We will learn about the feasts and saints that fill it, and the visible signs, the colors and symbols, that mark it. And, crucially, we will see how to bring it into the home, so that a man's family lives by the Church's calendar and is formed by it. This is one of the great neglected treasures of Catholic life, and recovering it changes everything about how a man experiences the passing year.

The aim is that you stop living by the world's calendar and begin living by the Church's, letting the rhythm of the liturgical year form you and your household around the mysteries of Christ, so that your whole experience of time is sanctified and drawn into the great story of salvation.

Consider what the secular calendar has done to the two feasts even most secular people still keep, Christmas and Easter, and you will see the stakes. The culture takes Christmas, strips it of its Advent preparation, begins it in November, drowns it in commerce, exhausts it before the day even arrives, and discards it on the twenty-sixth of December, exactly when the Church's Christmas season is only beginning. It takes Easter, reduces it to a single Sunday of candy and brunch, with no Lent before it to give it weight and no Easter season after it to let its joy unfold. The greatest feasts of the faith, in the hands of the secular calendar, become hollow, rushed, and quickly discarded, their depth stripped away. The liturgical year restores them: Advent's waiting that makes Christmas full, Christmas kept as a whole season of joy, Lent's fast that gives Easter its weight, Easter celebrated for fifty overflowing days. To recover the Church's calendar is, among other things, to recover the very feasts the culture has hollowed out, and to celebrate them with a depth the secular calendar has made most people forget was ever possible.

CHAPTER ONE

What the Liturgical Year Is

The Church's Calendar of Salvation

Before walking through it, understand what the liturgical year actually is, because grasping its purpose reveals why it is far more than a schedule of religious observances.

Time Structured Around Christ

The liturgical year is the Church's way of structuring the whole of time around the mysteries of Jesus Christ. Across the year, the Church walks through the entire life of Christ and the story of salvation: preparing for his coming in Advent, celebrating his

birth at Christmas, following his public life and passion, rejoicing in his resurrection at Easter, receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and living in the light of it all through the long weeks of Ordinary Time. The year is not an arbitrary sequence of holidays but a deliberate journey through the whole mystery of Christ, so that a man who lives the liturgical year passes, every year, through the entire story of salvation, from the anticipation of the Messiah to the coming of the Spirit and the promise of Christ's return. This is the deep purpose of the calendar: to structure time itself around Christ, so that the passing year becomes a continual walking-through of the mysteries of our redemption.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. — Hebrews 13:8

Not Remembering, But Participating

There is something deeper here than mere annual remembrance, and it is easily missed. When the Church celebrates the mysteries of Christ across the year, she is not merely remembering past events, as one might annually recall a historical anniversary. She is, in a real sense, making them present, so that the faithful do not merely think about Christ's birth or death or resurrection but participate in them, are drawn into them, receive their grace now. The liturgical celebration of a mystery makes that mystery present and available to the faithful, so that at Christmas Christ is truly born again in the hearts of believers, at Easter his victory is truly shared, at Pentecost his Spirit is truly poured out anew. This is why the liturgical year is more than a teaching device or a calendar of reminders; it is a means of grace, by which the mysteries of Christ are made present and their power communicated to those who live the year. To live the liturgical year is not to review the story of salvation from a distance but to enter it, year after year, and to receive its grace ever more deeply.

A Spiral, Not Merely a Circle

A man might object that an annual cycle sounds repetitive, the same seasons coming around again year after year in a monotonous circle. But the liturgical year is better understood as a spiral than a circle. Yes, the same seasons return each year, but a man does not return to them the same; he comes to each Advent, each Lent, each Easter as a different man than the year before, having grown, having suffered, having changed, and so the same season meets him at a new place and works in him in a new way. The Lent that purified him last year finds him further along this year and purifies him differently; the Easter that gave him joy last year gives him a deeper joy this year, built on all that has happened since. So the liturgical year is not a flat circle endlessly repeating but an ascending spiral, the same mysteries returning to meet a man ever higher on the climb, each year's journey through the seasons carrying him deeper into the mysteries than the

year before. This is why the year never grows stale to the man who lives it well: because he is always meeting the familiar seasons as a new man, and they are always able to work in him something they could not work before. The repetition is not monotony but deepening, the same great mysteries drawing a man ever further in, year after ascending year.

The Sanctification of Time

At its broadest, the liturgical year is the sanctification of time itself. Just as the Liturgy of the Hours sanctifies the hours of the day, the liturgical year sanctifies the whole span of the year, consecrating all of time to God by structuring it around Christ. Time, which the secular calendar fills with commerce and civic life, is claimed by the Church for God, its every season made an occasion of grace, its whole passage drawn into the mystery of salvation. This is a profound thing: that time itself, the medium in which a man lives his whole life, is not left secular but is sanctified, made holy, filled with God, through the liturgical year. The man who lives by the Church′s calendar lives in sanctified time, his whole year holy, every season an encounter with Christ, and this transforms his experience of time from a secular passage of days into a sacred journey through the mysteries of God.

CHAPTER TWO

Why It Matters

How the Calendar Forms a Man

A man might grant that the liturgical year is beautiful and still wonder whether it matters practically, whether it makes any real difference to live by it. It makes an enormous difference, because calendars form the people who live by them, and the two calendars form men in opposite directions.

Calendars Form Us

The rhythm of a man′s year shapes his soul more than he realizes. What he anticipates, what he prepares for, what he celebrates, what he fasts from and feasts on, the whole pattern of expectation and observance across the year quietly forms his desires, his values, his sense of what matters. The secular calendar forms men powerfully in this way, teaching them, through its seasons of shopping and consumption and leisure and achievement, to orient their year and their longing around these things, so that a man shaped by the secular calendar comes to anticipate and celebrate exactly what the culture

prizes. This formation is real and largely unconscious; a man absorbs the values of the calendar he lives by simply by living by it. And this is precisely why the liturgical year matters: because it is an alternative formation, a different calendar that forms a man in a different direction, around Christ rather than around consumption, teaching him to anticipate and celebrate the mysteries of salvation rather than the seasons of the marketplace.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. — Romans 12:2

Living in the Story of Salvation

To live the liturgical year is to live, continually, within the story of salvation, and this reorients a man's whole sense of where he is and what time it is. Instead of living in the flat, secular time of the marketplace, a man who keeps the Church's calendar lives in sacred time, always somewhere in the great story: waiting for the Messiah in Advent, rejoicing in his birth at Christmas, walking toward the cross in Lent, celebrating the resurrection at Easter. His year is not a meaningless cycle of commercial seasons but a continual journey through the mysteries of Christ, and this gives his whole experience of time a depth and a direction the secular calendar cannot provide. He knows, always, what time it is in the deepest sense, where he stands in the story of salvation, and this orientation shapes his prayer, his mood, his focus, drawing his whole life continually back to Christ. To live the liturgical year is to have one's time perpetually oriented toward Christ, which is a profound and formative gift.

The Rhythm of Fasting and Feasting

The liturgical year also restores to a man a healthy rhythm the secular calendar has largely lost: the alternation of fasting and feasting, penance and celebration, that is deeply human and deeply formative. The Church's calendar has its penitential seasons, Advent and especially Lent, and its festal seasons, Christmas and especially Easter, and this rhythm of self-denial followed by celebration forms a man in a way the flat secular calendar, which knows only consumption without penance, cannot. The man who fasts through Lent feasts at Easter with a joy the perpetually indulgent never know; the man who waits through Advent celebrates Christmas with a depth the culture's premature and exhausting Christmas season cannot touch. This rhythm of fasting and feasting, built into the liturgical year, is one of its great gifts, restoring to a man the capacity for both real penance and real celebration, which the secular calendar, offering endless mild consumption without either, has flattened away. The book on fasting in this library

develops the discipline; the liturgical year gives it its proper seasons and its answering feasts.

There is a deep human honesty in this rhythm that the flat secular calendar lacks. Human life is not all celebration, and a calendar that pretends it is, offering only an unbroken string of mild pleasures, is false to the actual texture of a human life, which includes grief, struggle, penance, and loss as well as joy. The liturgical year is honest about this. It has its penitential seasons that make room for sorrow and struggle and the hard work of conversion, and its festal seasons of unrestrained joy, and in alternating them it mirrors the real rhythm of a human life and of the spiritual journey, which moves through both darkness and light, both fasting and feasting, both the cross and the resurrection. A man who lives the liturgical year is given permission and structure for both, a season to mourn and repent and a season to rejoice, rather than being trapped in the secular calendar's relentless demand for constant mild contentment. This honesty about the full range of human experience, its sorrows as well as its joys, is one of the quiet gifts of the Church's calendar, which does not pretend life is all celebration but structures a rhythm that honors both the fasting and the feasting to which a full human life is called.

CHAPTER THREE

The Seasons

Walking Through the Year

Now the year itself, its seasons in order, each with its own character and purpose. Understanding what each season is for is the beginning of learning to live it.

The Shape of the Year

The liturgical year is built around two great poles, the celebration of Christ's birth at Christmas and the celebration of his death and resurrection at Easter, each preceded by a season of preparation and followed by a season of celebration, with long stretches of Ordinary Time filling the rest. The year begins not in January but with Advent, in late autumn, and proceeds through the following seasons.

Advent, *Four weeks of preparation and hopeful waiting for the coming of Christ, both his birth at Christmas and his return at the end. A quiet, expectant, lightly penitential season. Color: violet.*

Christmas, *The celebration of Christ's birth and its mysteries, a festal season of joy running from Christmas Day through the weeks that follow. Color: white and gold.*

Ordinary Time (first part), *The weeks after the Christmas season, following the early public life of Christ. Not "ordinary" as in dull, but ordered, counted time. Color: green.*

Lent, *Forty days of penance, fasting, prayer, and almsgiving in preparation for Easter, walking with Christ toward the cross. Begins on Ash Wednesday. Color: violet.*

The Sacred Triduum, *The three holiest days: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday into Easter, celebrating the Lord's Supper, passion, death, and the vigil of resurrection. The summit of the entire year.*

Easter, *Fifty days of the greatest celebration in the Church, rejoicing in Christ's resurrection, running from Easter Sunday to Pentecost. Color: white and gold.*

Ordinary Time (second part), *The long stretch after Pentecost through late autumn, living in the light of the Paschal mystery, ending with the feast of Christ the King. Color: green.*

And then, with Christ the King proclaimed at the end, the year closes, and Advent begins again, and the whole journey through the mysteries of Christ starts anew. This is the shape of the liturgical year, a continual cycle through the life of Christ and the story of salvation, from the waiting of Advent to the triumph of Christ the King, year after year, drawing a man ever deeper into the mysteries it celebrates.

A Word for Ordinary Time

Ordinary Time deserves a defense, because its name misleads and its length tempts a man to treat it as the dull filler between the exciting seasons. The word ordinary here does not mean commonplace or unimportant; it comes from the sense of ordered or counted, the numbered weeks that make up the greater part of the year. And far from being empty filler, Ordinary Time is the season in which the Church walks through the public life and teaching of Christ, following his ministry, his parables, his miracles, his journey toward Jerusalem, week by week through the long stretches of the year. It is the season of ordinary discipleship, of living out the faith in the everyday, of steady growth rather than dramatic celebration, and it is, not coincidentally, where most of a man's actual life is lived, in the ordinary weeks rather than the great feasts. To live Ordinary Time well is to recognize that the ordinary is where discipleship mostly happens, that the long green weeks are not a lull between the real action but the very substance of a life following Christ, lived in the daily and the unremarkable. This suits the whole vision of the ordinary life as the true field of holiness that runs through this library: Ordinary Time

is the liturgical year's affirmation that the ordinary weeks, not only the great feasts, are holy ground.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Great Seasons in Depth

Advent, Lent, and Easter

Three of the seasons carry special weight and reward closer attention, because they are the great seasons of the year, the ones that most transform a man who lives them well: Advent, Lent, and Easter. Learning to live these three is the heart of living the liturgical year.

Advent: Learning to Wait

Advent, the four weeks before Christmas, is a season of waiting and preparation, and its great lesson is one the modern man desperately needs: how to wait. The culture cannot wait; it begins Christmas in November and is exhausted with it by December, rushing to celebration without any preparation, so that Christmas arrives already stale. Advent teaches the opposite. It is a season of quiet, hopeful, expectant waiting, of preparing the heart for the coming of Christ, both his coming at Christmas and his coming again at the end of time. To live Advent well is to resist the culture's premature Christmas, to keep the season of waiting genuinely as a time of preparation and longing, so that when Christmas finally comes, it comes with the fullness that only real preparation can give. Advent restores to a man the capacity to wait, to prepare, to long, and thereby restores the depth of the celebration that follows. In a culture that has lost the art of waiting entirely, Advent is a countercultural school of hope, teaching a man to prepare his heart and long for the Lord's coming rather than rushing past the waiting to a celebration hollowed out by haste.

Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight. — Isaiah 40:3

Lent: Walking Toward the Cross

Lent, the forty days before Easter, is the great penitential season, a time of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving in which a man walks with Christ toward the cross, examining his life, turning from his sins, and preparing to celebrate the death and resurrection of the Lord. Lent is the season most Catholics know at least partially, through the giving up of something for its duration, but lived fully it is far more than that: a genuine season of

conversion, in which the three pillars of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are taken up seriously, and a man does real interior work, turning from sin and toward God, walking Christ's own road to Calvary. Lived well, Lent is one of the most transforming seasons of the year, a yearly retreat of forty days in which a man is genuinely converted more deeply, purified, and prepared to enter the great celebration of Easter. It culminates in Holy Week and the Sacred Triduum, the holiest days of the year, in which the Church celebrates the Lord's Supper, his passion and death, and the vigil of his resurrection, the very summit of the entire liturgical year. To live Lent fully, through to the Triduum, is to walk the whole road of Christ's passion and arrive at Easter genuinely transformed.

The Triduum: The Summit of the Year

The three days from Holy Thursday evening through Easter deserve to be singled out, because they are the summit of the entire liturgical year, the holiest days the Church keeps, toward which all of Lent has been climbing and from which all of Easter flows. On Holy Thursday, the Church celebrates the Last Supper, the institution of the Eucharist and the priesthood, and the Lord's washing of his disciples' feet. On Good Friday, she keeps the solemn commemoration of the Lord's passion and death, the one day of the year with no Mass, the church stripped bare, the cross venerated, the whole world seeming to hold its breath at the death of God. And on Holy Saturday, in the great Easter Vigil, the holiest liturgy of the entire year, the Church keeps watch in the darkness and then explodes into the light of the resurrection, new fire kindled, the Easter candle lit, the alleluia returning, new members baptized, the victory of Christ over death proclaimed anew. These three days are the very center of the Christian year, the celebration of the mysteries on which everything depends, and a man who enters into them fully, keeping the Triduum with real attention, participating in these greatest of all liturgies, finds them among the most powerful spiritual experiences available in the whole of Catholic life. If a man does nothing else, he should keep the Triduum, entering fully into these three holiest days, for they are the beating heart of the entire liturgical year.

Easter: The Great Celebration

Easter is the greatest celebration in the entire Church, and it is not a single day but a season, fifty days of rejoicing in the resurrection of Christ, running from Easter Sunday all the way to Pentecost. This surprises many Catholics, who celebrate Easter for a day and move on; the Church celebrates it for fifty days, the longest and greatest festal season of the year, because the resurrection is the center and triumph of the whole faith and deserves a sustained and overflowing celebration. To live Easter fully is to keep celebrating well beyond Easter Sunday, to let the joy of the resurrection fill the whole fifty days, to feast where Lent had a man fast, to rejoice in the victory of Christ over death for

the entire season. And it culminates in Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the birth of the Church, the sending of the apostles on mission. Lived fully, the Easter season is a sustained overflow of joy, the answering feast to Lent's fast, in which a man celebrates the central triumph of his faith not for a day but for fifty, and is filled with the joy and the Spirit that the resurrection pours out.

CHAPTER FIVE

Feasts and Saints

The Days That Fill the Year

Woven through the seasons of the year is a whole other layer: the feasts and the saints' days that fill the calendar, giving nearly every day of the year its own celebration and its own companion. Understanding this layer opens up much of the richness of the liturgical year.

Solemnities, Feasts, and Memorials

The Church's celebrations come in ranks of importance. The greatest are called solemnities, the highest celebrations, such as Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and certain great days of the Lord, of Mary, and of the most important saints. Below these are feasts, celebrations of high importance though below the solemnities, such as certain events in the life of Christ and the days of the apostles and major saints. And below these are memorials, the commemorations of the many saints that fill the ordinary days of the calendar. This ranking tells a man the relative weight of each day's celebration, which days are the great ones to be marked with special solemnity and which are the quieter daily commemorations. Knowing the ranks helps a man live the year with proportion, giving the great solemnities their due weight while receiving the daily memorials as the gentler companions they are.

We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses. — Hebrews 12:1

The Saints Fill the Year

One of the great riches of the liturgical calendar is that nearly every day of the year is associated with one or more saints, so that as a man lives the year he is accompanied, day by day, by the great company of the saints, each with his day, his story, his example, his intercession. This is the sanctoral cycle, the calendar of the saints running alongside the seasons, and it means that the liturgical year is not only a journey through the life of

Christ but a continual walking in the company of his saints, a different one each day, whose feast the Church keeps and whose friendship she offers. To live the liturgical year attentive to the saints is to be introduced, across the year, to a vast company of friends and models and intercessors, each brought forward on his day, so that the year becomes populated with the saints as with a great extended family, always another one to meet, to learn from, to ask for prayers. The book on the saints as companions in this library develops this friendship; the liturgical calendar is how the saints are woven, day by day, through the whole year.

Mary Through the Year

Mary, above all the saints, is honored throughout the liturgical year with a rich series of her own feasts and solemnities, marking the great mysteries of her life and her role in salvation, so that as the year turns, a man walks also through the life of the Mother alongside the life of her Son. From the great solemnities of Mary to the many memorials of her various titles and appearances, the Marian feasts thread through the whole year, keeping the Mother continually present in the calendar as she is continually present in the life of the Church. To live the liturgical year is thus to live also in the company of Mary, her feasts marking the year, her presence woven through it, drawing a man again and again to the Mother who leads always to her Son.

CHAPTER SIX

The Visible Signs

The Colors and Symbols of the Year

The liturgical year is not only a structure of time but a visible thing, marked by colors and symbols that a man sees at Mass and that carry the meaning of the seasons in a visible language. Learning to read this language deepens a man's experience of the year and connects the calendar to what he sees before him.

The Liturgical Colors

The most visible sign of the liturgical year is the color of the vestments and altar cloths, which changes with the seasons and feasts, carrying the meaning of each in a visible language. Violet, a color of penance and preparation, marks the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent. White and gold, colors of joy and glory, mark the festal seasons of Christmas and Easter and the great feasts of the Lord, of Mary, and of many saints. Red, the color of blood and fire, marks the feasts of martyrs, the apostles, and the celebration

of Pentecost with its tongues of flame, as well as Good Friday. Green, the color of life and growth, marks the long stretches of Ordinary Time. And rose, a softer color, appears on two particular Sundays in Advent and Lent as a note of joy amid the penitential seasons. Once a man learns to read these colors, the very sight of the sanctuary tells him where he stands in the year, the violet of Lent or the white of Easter or the green of Ordinary Time announcing the season visibly, so that the meaning of the year is carried not only in the calendar but before his eyes at every Mass.

He has made everything beautiful in its time. — Ecclesiastes 3:11

The Deeper Language of Signs

Beyond the colors, the liturgical year is marked by a whole language of signs and observances that carry its meaning: the Advent wreath with its candles counting the weeks of waiting; the ashes of Ash Wednesday that begin Lent; the stripped and silent church of Good Friday; the new fire and the Easter candle of the great vigil; the particular music, the particular practices, the particular textures of each season. This whole language of signs is not decoration but meaning made visible and tangible, the seasons of the year embodied in things a man can see and touch and do, so that the liturgical year is lived not only in the mind but through the senses, in a rich language of signs that carries its meaning into the body and the imagination. Learning to notice and read this language, the wreath and the ashes and the candle and the rest, deepens a man′s experience of the year immeasurably, connecting the structure of the calendar to a whole world of visible, tangible signs that make its meaning present to the senses.

Why the Signs Matter

These visible signs matter because a man is not a pure spirit but an embodied creature, who receives meaning through the senses, and the liturgical year, in its wisdom, embodies its meaning in signs a man can see and touch precisely so that it reaches the whole man, not only his mind. The colors, the wreath, the ashes, the candle, all of it works on a man through his senses and imagination, forming him beneath the level of thought, so that the meaning of the seasons sinks in not only as ideas understood but as realities seen and touched and lived. This is why the signs of the liturgical year are not trivial: they are how the year reaches the whole man, embodying its meaning in the visible and tangible so that it forms not just his understanding but his imagination, his senses, his whole embodied self. Attend to the signs, then, and let them work on you, receiving the meaning of the seasons through the rich sensory language in which the Church has clothed them.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Bringing It Into the Home

The Domestic Church and the Year

Here is the practical payoff toward which everything has been building: bringing the liturgical year into the home, so that a man's family lives by the Church's calendar and is formed by it. This is where the liturgical year moves from something observed at Mass to something lived, and it is one of the most powerful things a man can do to form his family in the faith.

The Home as the Place the Year Is Lived

The liturgical year is meant to be lived not only at Mass but in the home, the domestic church, where its seasons shape the family's life through the year. This is the tradition the culture has largely stripped away and that a man can recover: a home that keeps the seasons, that waits through Advent and feasts at Christmas, that fasts through Lent and rejoices at Easter, that marks the great feasts and the family's favorite saints, so that the children grow up within the rhythm of the Church's year and are formed by it as deeply as their peers are formed by the secular calendar. The home is where the liturgical year becomes a way of life rather than an observance, where its seasons shape the meals, the decorations, the practices, the whole texture of the family's time, so that a child raised in such a home absorbs the faith through the very rhythm of his year. This is among the most powerful forms of formation available to a man, the shaping of his family's whole experience of time around Christ, and it is his to build.

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. — Joshua 24:15

Practical Ways to Keep the Seasons

Bringing the year into the home need not be elaborate; simple practices, kept faithfully, form a family powerfully over the years. A family might keep an Advent wreath, lighting its candles through the weeks of waiting, and resist the premature Christmas of the culture, so that Advent is genuinely a season of preparation and Christmas, when it comes, is a real feast celebrated through its whole season. A family might mark Lent with its fasting and its practices, and then celebrate Easter with real festivity for the whole fifty days. A family might keep the great feasts with special meals and observances, and honor the saints on their days, telling their stories, so that the children come to know the saints as friends. The particular practices matter less than the faithful keeping of the rhythm, the living of the seasons in the home year after year, so that the Church's calendar, not

merely the world's, shapes the family's experience of time. The resources of this library, including the liturgical year calendar among the Daily Bread tools, can help a man know what each season and day holds and how to keep it; the essential thing is simply to begin bringing the year into the home and to keep it faithfully.

Start With One Season

A man drawn to bring the liturgical year into his home may feel daunted by the whole of it and not know where to begin, and the answer is to start with one season rather than attempting everything at once. Choose the next great season approaching, Advent or Lent most naturally, and resolve to keep that one season well in the home this year, with a few simple practices faithfully kept. Keep an Advent wreath and resist the culture's rushed Christmas; or keep Lent's fasting and mark its practices as a family. Do that one season well, and let it establish itself, and then next year add another, and gradually, season by season, year by year, the family comes to live the whole calendar, not through a single overwhelming effort but through the patient building of one season at a time. This is how the liturgical year takes root in a home: not all at once, but gradually, one well-kept season building on the last, until, over a few years, the family finds itself living by the Church's calendar as naturally as it once lived by the world's. Do not be daunted by the whole; begin with one season, keep it well, and build from there.

The Father Leads

As with all the formation of the domestic church, developed in the books on leading a family in faith in this library, the father has a particular role in bringing the liturgical year into the home. It falls especially to him to lead the family in keeping the seasons, to establish the practices and sustain them, to see that the home lives by the Church's calendar, because a father who leads his family into the rhythm of the liturgical year gives them a formation that will shape them for life. This need not mean he does everything himself, but it means he takes responsibility for the family living the year, ensuring that the seasons are kept, the feasts marked, the rhythm sustained, so that his children grow up formed by the Church's calendar. This is a central part of the spiritual leadership of the home, and a father who takes it up, bringing the liturgical year into his family's life and sustaining it faithfully, does one of the most formative things a man can do for those he loves.

CONCLUSION

Living in Sacred Time

Return to the two calendars with which we began, and the question of which one a man will live by. This book has been an argument and an invitation: that the liturgical year is not decoration but a way of life, the Church's own calendar, structured around the mysteries of Christ, meant to be lived and to form a man and his household around Christ rather than around the world. We have seen that it sanctifies time itself, structuring the whole year around Christ and making his mysteries present; that it forms a man in a different direction than the secular calendar, teaching him to wait in Advent, to repent in Lent, to rejoice at Easter, to live continually in the story of salvation; that it fills the year with feasts and saints and a rich visible language of colors and signs; and that it is meant, above all, to be brought into the home, where it forms a family profoundly.

To live the liturgical year is to live in sacred time, to have one's whole experience of the passing year drawn into the mysteries of Christ, so that a man always knows what time it is in the deepest sense, where he stands in the great story, and is continually formed by the rhythm of the Church's year around the Lord it celebrates. This is a treasure most Catholics have let slip, living by the world's calendar with a bit of religious color added, never knowing the depth and the formation available in the calendar that is theirs by right. It is there for the recovering, and recovering it changes everything about how a man experiences time.

So begin to live by the Church's calendar. Learn its seasons and keep them: wait through Advent, feast through Christmas, walk through Lent to the cross, rejoice through the fifty days of Easter, live in the light of it all through Ordinary Time. Notice the feasts and the saints that fill the year, and let them accompany you. Read the visible language of the colors and signs. And bring it all into your home, leading your family into the rhythm of the Church's year, so that your household lives in sacred time and your children are formed by the calendar of salvation. Do this, and you will find your whole experience of time transformed, sanctified, drawn continually into the mysteries of Christ, lived no longer by the world's flat calendar but by the Church's deep one, in sacred time, oriented always toward the Lord whose year it is.

There is a time for every matter under heaven, and the Church has drawn all of time into Christ. Enter that sacred time, and live your year, and your family's year, within the great story of salvation, which is always, whatever the season, moving toward the Lord who is its beginning and its end.

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The Liturgical Year: Living by the Church's Calendar, Not the World's is part of The Daily Bread Library.

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