

Rite



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Source and Summit

Reception of the Eucharist Under Two Species

Mark Wedig, OP

Review of *Models of the Eucharist*

Esther Mary Nickel, RSM

Beyond Accessibility

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Decor for Progressive Solemnities

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It is easy for those who care for the liturgical art and environment to remove the decor after Pentecost and heave a sigh of relief for the summer. We rejoice to begin the longest block of Ordinary Time in the liturgical year! Some might even think, “Oh good! Put up the green, and let’s go!”

With both energy and ideas waning, the easy route is enticing. It is tempting to decorate for the seasonal cycles of Advent through Pentecost and then take an environmental vacation.

Conversely, a parish may go to the other extreme, making it hard during Ordinary Time to decipher the texture and feeling of the environment from the high holy days.

Remember that most weddings take place within Ordinary Time, and you may wish to consider a simple environment that will not conflict with them. This helps avoid unnecessary clashes between the liturgist and the mother of the bride!

Effective decor is more than the Church’s possessing a seasonal outfit in varied colors. Just as musical selections for the *Gloria* may be more subdued during Ordinary Time than the Easter or Christmas season, the decor should reflect the difference of the liturgical seasons. It need not be a matter of “all or nothing.” In reality, there are countless shades of green, liturgically speaking!

While we know and are comfortable with the yearly liturgical cycle and its seasons, for many the entire subtlety of the sanctoral cycle is lost. Many do not realize that within any liturgical season,

some days are considered to be more important than others. Learning to recognize the categories of celebrations known as progressive solemnities may shed light on your environmental decor.

While spending nearly 20 years in a Benedictine monastery, I grew familiar with the nuances of the daily sanctoral cycle, or Calendar of the Saints, as our chapel reflected on each of them. While I do not recall writing down a set of rules or guidelines for decor, it was based upon the progressive solemnity of the feast day.

THE SANCTORAL CYCLE

With that in mind, let us take a few moments to discuss the degrees of solemnity and suggestions for appropriate decor. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* laid out guidelines for our current sanctoral cycle.

Raised up to perfection by the manifold grace of God, and already in possession of eternal salvation, they sing God’s perfect praise in heaven and offer prayers for us. By celebrating the passage of these saints from earth to heaven the Church proclaims the paschal mystery achieved in the saints who have suffered and been glorified with Christ; she proposes them to the faithful as examples drawing all to the Father through Christ, and through their merits she pleads for God’s favors (SC, #104).

Another document, the 1974 *General Norms for the Liturgical Year* (GNLY) printed in the front of the *Roman Missal* (Sacramentary), is more detailed.

8. As it celebrates the mystery of Christ in yearly cycle, the Church also venerates with a particular love, Mary, the Mother of God, and sets before the devotion of the faithful the memory of the martyrs and other saints.
9. The saints of universal significance have celebrations obligatory throughout the entire Church. Other saints are either listed in the General Calendar for optional celebration or are left to the veneration of some particular Church, region, or religious family.
10. According to their importance, celebrations are distinguished from each other and named as follows: solemnities, feasts, memorials.
11. Solemnities are counted as the principal days in the calendar year and their observance begins with evening prayer I of the preceding day. Some also have their own vigil Mass for use when Mass is celebrated in the evening of the preceding day.

Solemnities include:December 8: **Immaculate Conception**December 25: **Christmas**March 19: **Saint Joseph**March 25: **Annunciation;**June 24: **John the Baptist**June 29: **Saints Peter and Paul**August 15: **Assumption of Mary**November 1: **All Saints Day***Movable solemnities include: Epiphany, Easter, Ascension, and Christ the King.*

Solemnities are often holy days of obligation, Marian feasts, or feasts of our Lord celebrated on Sundays. By using more candles, fancier vestments, additional plants and cut flowers, and upgrading the general decor, we help the assembly recognize the difference between a feast and solemnity.

If a typical weekday mass has two candles, adding another two will provide a more solemn atmosphere. Use a variety of cubes and cloths to create several heights on which to add plants, flowers, or vigil candles. Maybe a parish has special vessels for feast days. This may be likened to bringing out the "good dishes" for special occasions.

An icon befitting the celebration highlights the solemnity. Explanations in the order of worship or church bulletin educate. Matching cantor books and information binders for the celebrant are available for every liturgical color and are another easy way to tie the day together.

FEASTS

13. Feasts are celebrated within the limits of the natural day and accordingly do not have evening prayer I. Exceptions are feasts of the Lord that fall on a Sunday in Ordinary Time and in the Christmas season and that replace the Sunday office.

Examples include: December 12, Our Lady of Guadalupe; November 2, All Souls Day, and the feasts of Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

With 19 feasts throughout the year, it will mostly be those attending daily Mass and the school children who note the liturgical differences of these days. Engaging an art and environment group this frequently may be impossible in your situation, but surely the liturgist or sacristan could do something as simple as draping a red strip of cloth over the altar for a martyr or changing the colors of large glass vigil candles to reflect the day. Just replacing

small weekday candles with taller ones will create a more festive environment.

MEMORIALS

14. Memorials are either obligatory or optional. Their observance is integrated into the celebration of the occurring weekday in accord with the norms set forth in the General Instructions of the Roman Missal and the Liturgy of the Hours.

When we think of Saints Francis of Assisi, Frances Cabrini, Elizabeth of Hungary, Julian of Norwich, or Benedict, these are generally memorial celebrations. The exception would be the patron saint of a parish or religious order, in which case the day would move up to a feast or a solemnity.

Memorial celebrations fill the bulk of the ordo. There are 75 memorials and 79 optional memorials listed throughout the year. For these, the priest's wearing the appropriate color may be all that is needed for differentiation. Perhaps, though, a group of individuals from daily Mass might like to take turns researching "the saint of the day" and displaying information on a bulletin board near the church entrance.

CONCLUSION

As I write this article, I have considered the role that liturgical environment plays in liturgical catechesis. None of the suggestions I offer are taxing or time-consuming tasks. What I am suggesting is that using forethought in the daily decor will help create a mindfulness within worshipers.

If reading this spurs you to follow your ordo or *Sourcebook* more closely and to think about changes you can make within your church to celebrate progressive solemnities, take a moment to teach the congregation with an article for the bulletin explaining progressive solemnities, and the liturgical colors involved. You may be surprised at how many parishioners do not know why or how the liturgical colors are chosen.

One of the biggest mistakes that we can make as liturgical professionals is to assume the congregation knows more than it does. The second biggest mistake is to assume that the parish does not want to know. Effective communication is an important tool any time you plan on making changes within the parish. I guarantee you someone will thank you for the information, and you will be opening minds and once again inviting parishioners to partake with "full, active, and conscious participation." **R**

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