

Autumn Newsletter 2021



It hardly seems possible that we are thinking of Advent, which will very soon be upon us. Where did the year go? It seems that Covid has occupied so much of our thought that time has almost slipped by un-noticed. The effects of Covid, of course, still leave us with a lot of uncertainties – uncertainties about whether or not restrictions will be reimposed or, even, if there will be another lockdown.

The gains we are slowly making liturgically are very heartening: it is good that we can sing again, albeit with masks on, and good to see our churches gradually becoming more full as people become a little less fearful of gathering together in church. As we begin to take up our liturgical ministries again, do remember that there are a number of resources to be found under the 'Ministries' tab above.

At the moment the Sunday obligation remains suspended. However, our bishops are calling us to focus on the First Sunday of Advent (28th November) as a point where we pick up that 'obligation' once again. But what do we understand by 'Sunday obligation'? We explore this in a short article below along with further items that we might think about as we approach the Season of Advent. We include, too, a piece for families with children about the Night of Light (all Hallows' Eve) with a family activity and prayer for carving a pumpkin.

It is not too early to be thinking about the environment of our churches during Advent and to be thinking about our music for the season so we include a couple of articles on these topics too.

In-formation videos

A series of information videos is planned to remind and encourage people of an understanding of the Mass. A number of different aspects of the Mass are explored - the many ways in which we encounter Christ and how that affects our lives. It is hoped that this will help us all to re-engage with our communities and our sharing in the Eucharist and to re-discover Christ through a renewed appreciation of the liturgy. Watch out for these, beginning in Advent.

Our Sunday Obligation

When we think of an obligation, we tend to think negatively, of something imposed upon us, perhaps even against our will. When we are students we have an obligation to do our homework; as adults we have an obligation to pay our taxes, neither of which is always enjoyable. Going to Mass on a Sunday has been referred to as our Sunday Obligation, but this is a positive thing, rather than a negative one; this is an obligation born of love.

When we went into lockdown in Lent last year, our Bishops released us from the Sunday Obligation but now, as we venture into to some sort of freedom, they call us to have our eyes focused on the First Sunday of Advent (28 November) as a point where we pick up that 'obligation' once again.

How can we view this? Our Sunday obligation to attend Mass shouldn't be seen as an 'imposition' but, rather, as an invitation to grow deeper in love with God. If we truly understand what's going

on at Mass and who it is we encounter we will want to build our weekend around Mass. St John Paul II explained this in his apostolic exhortation 'Dies Domini.'

'Even if in the earliest times it was not judged necessary to be prescriptive, the Church has not ceased to confirm this obligation of conscience, which rises from the inner need felt so strongly by the Christians of the first centuries. It was only later, faced with the half-heartedness or negligence of some, that the Church had to make explicit the duty to attend Sunday Mass. (para 47)

So, even today, the Catholic who is able to attend Mass must make every reasonable effort to be there. But above all, the obligation should not be seen as an 'imposition,' but an 'invitation' to enter into the love of God, as St John Paul II reiterated. Sunday is a day which is at the very heart of the Christian life ...

'I would strongly urge everyone to rediscover Sunday: Do not be afraid to give your time to Christ! Yes, let us open our time to Christ, that he may cast light upon it and give it direction. He is the One who knows the secret of time and the secret of eternity, and he gives us 'his day' as an ever-new gift of his love ... Time given to Christ is never time lost, but is rather time gained, so that our relationships and indeed our whole life may become more profoundly human.' (para 7)

The Sunday Obligation is a great gift to humanity, and Catholics are called to fulfil it with a joyful heart.

Hallowe'en (All Hallow's Eve)

Night of Light - a celebration for All Hallows' Eve

The Night of Light celebrates the victory of light over darkness. This year, on 31 October, we might celebrate All Hallows' Eve, the beginning of the feast of All Saints. This was a great Christian festival in the past when the lives of the saints and angels were remembered on the night before the feast of All Saints. Children can research the lives of saints and choose to dress as a saint or angel rather than in Hallowe'en costumes.

We could decorate our house with lights to remind us that Jesus is the light of the world. This can include carved pumpkins with 'Pumpkin Prayer' faces (see below) and stringed lights. Paper lanterns, collage paper candles and garlands of stars could also be made. To remind the children of Jesus bringing light to the darkness in our world we might share the story of the Transfiguration (*Matthew 17:1-3*) when Jesus was transformed by light. Children could be encouraged to think of ways that they can be a light to others in the world today.

Party games can also be played, such as apple-bobbing and doughnuts on strings. You could write some fun quizzes about your children's favourite saints. Pictures of saints could also be used to make a 'saint' bingo game. But games don't have to be involved – how about enjoying a special meal or takeaway as a family?

All Hallows' Eve doesn't have to be dark and scary; let's make it about goodness and light, letting our lights shine in all that we do and endeavouring to be saints in our daily lives.

The Pumpkin Prayer

Jesus,

As I carve my pumpkin, help me to pray this prayer:

Open my mind so that I can learn about you;

(cut the top off the pumpkin)

Take all my sin and forgive the wrong that I do.

(clean out the inside)

Open my eyes so your love I will see;

(cut eyes shaped like hearts)

I'm sorry for times I've turned up my nose at what you've given to me.

(cut a nose in the shape of a cross)

Open my ears so your word I will hear;

(cut ears shaped like a Bible)

Open my mouth to tell others you're near.

(cut the mouth in the shape of a fish)

Let your light shine in all I say and do!

(place candle inside and light it)

All Saints and All Souls

On 31 October we will celebrate the Solemnity of All Saints, transferred from the Monday as it is a Holy Day of Obligation. During the year the Church celebrates one by one the feasts of the saints but on this particular day she joins them all in one festival - all the saints: canonised or beatified, and the multitude of those who are in heaven and known only to God. There are a number of ways in which to enhance this celebration – perhaps by singing a Litany of Saints instead of an entrance hymn; there are a number of beautiful litanies available.

The Feast of All Souls', officially known as 'the Commemoration of all the Faithful Departed', is celebrated on 2 November and we remember and pray for all of those who are in Purgatory. There are many different ways that this day can be marked. For example, if there is a cemetery in your parish, perhaps your parish might consider a liturgy with the blessing of graves, walking in procession to the cemetery if it is not too far. Some parishes have a Book of the Remembrance or Book of the Dead displayed in the parish, where people can write the names of deceased loved ones, who are then remembered at Mass and other liturgies throughout November, while others might hold a novena of prayer for the Holy Souls – from 2 November until 10 November.

Remembrance Sunday

Celebrated this year on Sunday 14 November, Remembrance Sunday is a special day of prayer for all victims of war. Wearing a red poppy is the most immediately recognisable mark of Remembrance Day but there are, too, other ways in which we might mark the day in our parishes. There could be an Act of Remembrance during Mass, though the timing of Mass might make deciding 'when' difficult; it may be appropriate to have a visual display using an arrangement of poppies or, if there is a War Memorial nearby, an Act of Remembrance might take place there and a few ideas for this are given [here](#). Do remember, too, that on this day one Mass for the Dead may be celebrated.

The liturgical environment for Advent

The liturgical environment for Advent should reflect its twofold character, namely, a time of preparation for the Christmas season and a looking forward to Christ's second coming at the end of time. Thus, according to the Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the General Roman Calendar, Advent is a period of devout and expectant delight. Even though Advent celebrates two distinct comings of Christ – we anticipate the second coming and we remember the first coming at the incarnation – it would not be helpful to plan two different liturgical environments. Advent remains a unified season that happens to remind us of two different comings of Christ.

Advent is not simply *pre-Christmas*, rather it has a character of its own. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal states that during Advent, floral decoration of the altar should be done in moderation without showing anticipation of the full joy of Christmas. In other words, trees, poinsettias, and wreaths should not be used in the décor for Advent.

Unique to Advent is the Advent wreath, constructed of a circle of evergreen branches into which are inserted four candles, three violet and one rose, four violet or four white. The rose candle, if used, is lit on the Third Sunday of Advent. The wreath should be visible to the members of the assembly. It is best suspended from the ceiling or placed on a stand, but not in a place on the sanctuary that blocks access to the altar, ambo, or chair. Consideration should be given to placing it in the gathering space or a devotional space. Placing the wreath in the narthex means that everyone can see it upon entering, it means that the change of season is immediately announced on the First Sunday of Advent, and it gives children the opportunity to see it up close and ask questions about it. The parish could also have leaflets nearby with an Advent wreath prayer for each week and encourage families to have an Advent wreath in their homes where they could pray the prayers together. Various creative displays can make the Advent wreath a work of art and an object of devotion. Of course, the evergreens used in it should be real and not artificial. The Advent wreath is a beloved devotion, but it is just that – a devotion. A blessing of the wreath may take place at Mass and it is permitted to have the candles lit during Mass. It would narrow the liturgical meaning of the season, however, to have the Advent wreath as the focal point of the liturgical environment.

In some places, a large crib is erected at the beginning of Advent and left empty of figures until Christmas Eve. The difficulty with this is that it focusses our attention entirely on the incarnation and the birth of a baby, running a risk of missing the more important and rich Advent motifs.

Banners and candles on wreaths that mark progression in the season from week to week must be done carefully because Advent is a season of four Sundays, not four weeks. The real progression of the season is from focussing on the second coming of Christ to his first coming in the incarnation, and both of these comings in the context of how Christ comes to us here and now in sacrament. The issue here is that of time; liturgy can never be only marked off in *chronos* (clock time), but always includes *kairos* (a point in time pregnant with meaning).

Musical notes for Advent

Advent is coming and, with it, a chance for many of us to take part in proper sung music again. Over the lockdown period some people kept the music in their parish going by holding online rehearsals, doing recordings which could be included in Masses or distributed outside Mass, and so on. If you did, that's great. If you couldn't, or didn't want to, that's understandable.

Now that restrictions have been lifted, we are allowed to sing again; we can rehearse; we can invite the congregation to join us. Many parishes will be rehearsing and singing with their choirs, musicians and music groups already, so now it's a matter of choosing what music to use. You may have a list that you got together for last year, in the hope that you might be able to use it then. If so, it might be just what you need this year. However, this year, more than ever, it is worth thinking deeply about some of the practical and pastoral issues which we are facing.

Should the music be - on average - loud or soft? Obviously, it would be lovely to have a bright, vibrant and happy Advent. We missed out on it last year, but it's back now; we can push the boat out! But, is your congregation happy singing loudly yet? The Covid question hasn't gone away. As we write, the infection rate had dipped but now it seems to be rising again. In the next few weeks it may dip, it may rise. Hopefully we won't have another lockdown or singing ban but, even so, do consider whether your congregation might be better served with quieter music, singable behind the masks which some, if not all, people will be wearing.

What is the mood you are going to set? Will it be a happy, joyful, hopeful Advent? It might take a bit of thinking and research to get quieter triumphant music, but it is a search worth making.

How much music will you ask your congregation to sing? Even if this wasn't your way in the 'old days', might you - in this interim time, and just for this year - ask your choir to fill one or two of the musical slots? It doesn't have to be anything very clever - just a hymn or song sung or played well - but it may be part of an appropriate solution in your local situation.

Another aspect of your task might be your own people. The lockdown period has seen many people re-evaluate their commitments. While 18 months would normally see a steady flow of people in and out of your music groups, you are likely to face a sudden change with old members who have left and new members coming along. People's skills level might have changed as well; children's voices may have changed, older voices may well be out of practice (and may have also have changed). Music which everybody knew really well may no longer be familiar to everybody ... It all makes our job more challenging, although does provide opportunities for new music to be introduced.

Finally, consider **how** and **what** you are singing. The advice has been slowly to reintroduce music into the Mass. So, what should you introduce first? Hymns and songs at the start, end, communion or offertory seem to be the obvious answer - but are they the correct answer? The Gospel Acclamation, the Holy, Holy and the Lamb of God are, in fact more important and should take precedence. This could be an opportunity to encourage a focus on these fundamental parts of our liturgy (and they're short, too, which minimises air flow!) Do remember, too, that we don't have the Gloria in Advent. Additionally, some parishes have, with justification, been doing some parts of the Mass in slightly different ways over lockdown - the Responsorial Psalm, for instance, has sometimes been shortened to just have the response at the beginning and end, rather than after each verse. Such interim arrangements may have worked over the 'Covid' era, but we can now reintroduce the correct versions of our liturgies once again.

Art & Architecture

Please remember that the Art & Architecture Committee of the Liturgy Office is here to help you, especially with guidance on matters of liturgical Art & Architecture. If you are considering any changes to your parish which will affect the liturgical and devotional life of the parish it is

important that you contact the Liturgy Office for guidance and permission where necessary. Please refer to pages 159 and 160 of this year's Liturgical Diary for details, see <https://cliftondiocese.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Art-Architecture.pdf> or contact liturgy@cliftondiocese.com

2022 Liturgical Diary



The Liturgical Diary is almost complete and will soon be available in parishes and online. The cost remains unchanged and, at £6.50 per copy, is a real bargain. It contains, in addition to all the information about Liturgical texts for Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours each day, little hagiographies of the saints celebrated throughout the year. There are explanatory items about the liturgical seasons and feasts celebrated, a number of blessings for use throughout the year and a year planner for 2022. Do keep an eye on the Diocesan website and your parish newsletter for details of when it becomes available.