

AN EXTRAORDINARY MONTH IN ORDINARY TIME

June is usually a “quiet” month liturgically. The Church returns to “Ordinary Time” the day after Pentecost, so green vestments are the norm until Advent and the Sunday readings follow the A/B/C cycles with few interruptions. But June 2014 is a “perfect storm” of calendar days that delay Sunday’s green vestments until July and give us a succession of special celebrations on each Sunday this month.

Because of Easter’s late date this year (April 20), June begins with the Seventh Sunday of Easter. For most of the United States, this Sunday is replaced by the Solemnity of the Ascension of Our Lord. (Nebraska and the northeastern states from Pennsylvania through New England celebrate the Ascension on the preceding Thursday, which is also a holyday of obligation for those places.)

June 8 is the Solemnity of Pentecost. This Jewish festival – the Feast of Weeks – celebrated the completion of the spring harvest, 50 days after the observance of Passover. (The word “Pentecost” derives from the Greek word for “50.”) Whereas unleavened bread was used in celebrating the beginning of the harvest, leavened bread made from the new grain was used to mark its completion. The feast acquired added significance as a remembrance of the covenant at Mount Sinai, which occurred about seven weeks after Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt after the first Passover. As Moses had gone up to meet God on Sinai and brought back the law and the covenant, so the Risen Jesus ascended to the Father and sent down the Holy Spirit, completing the establishment of the new covenant. Thus, Pentecost is the birthday of the Church, the community of believers accepting the Gospel preached by the Spirit-filled disciples.

June 15 is the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. While most feasts celebrate specific events or persons in salvation history, this is a theological feast, celebrating the reality of God as three Persons in one Divine Being. We try to appreciate God’s Triune nature, God’s relationship to us and ours to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, even as we realize that this mystery is beyond our ability to comprehend.

June 22 is the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi). We celebrate the mystery of Christ’s presence in the Sacrament of the Eucharist under the appearances of bread and wine. We acknowledge that this sacrament unites us not only with the Lord Jesus, but also with one another, in the faith community that is the Body of Christ. This sacrament nourishes and strengthens us with the power of the Spirit, enabling us to become the presence of Christ in the world today.

June 29 is the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, the two great apostolic pillars of Christianity. Peter was named by Jesus as the rock upon which the Church would be built. Paul was chosen by the Risen Christ to spread the Gospel to Gentiles and Jews throughout the Mediterranean region. Their feast is one of six that take precedence over Sundays in Ordinary Time, and the first of four that do this in 2014. The others this year are the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (Sept. 14), All Souls’ Day (Nov. 2) and the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica (Nov. 9).