



Liturgical Year

As nature has seasons that reflect their own characteristics, colours and cycle, so too the Church has seasons characterized by varying purposes, colours and celebrations situated throughout the year. These seasons, collectively, are known as the **liturgical year** or **cycle**. The word **liturgy** comes from two Greek words meaning “public work” and describes the official worship of the Church as celebrated through the Eucharist and the sacraments.

Nature’s seasons reflect life, death and growth. So too the liturgical year is marked by recognition and celebration of the cycle of life, death and new life (in Christ). The liturgical calendar does not align with the secular calendar, with the beginning of the Church year being the First Sunday of Advent, normally falling at the end of November or the beginning of December, and ending with the Feast of Christ the King.

As well as the key celebrations throughout the Church’s year such as Easter and Christmas, days throughout the year will have a liturgical focus on the life of a saint or event. These days will be designated a **solemnity**, **feast** or **memorial** depending on their importance. A solemnity is the highest ranking celebrations usually recalling an important event in the life of Jesus, but can also acknowledge a saint such as St Joseph or All Saints. In Australia, the significance of Saint Mary MacKillop is marked by a solemnity. Second in ranking is a feast day, which typically honours a special saint such as one of the apostles, or another saint with universal significance such as St Patrick or St Stephen. Feast days can also honour special events such as the Transfiguration and Our Lady’s Birthday. Finally, memorials most often honour and focus on the life of one of the many saints the church recognizes, although their names may not always be familiar.

The flow of the liturgical year is also represented in the Liturgy of the Word. Readings at Mass reflect selections from the Old and New Testaments and mapped over a three year period for Sundays and a two year period for weekday Masses. All of the readings are contained within a book called the **Lectionary**. Focussing on the three year cycle, gospel readings for Year A are largely taken from Matthew, Year B from Mark and Year C from Luke. Readings from John’s gospel are interspersed throughout the year, predominately during the season of Easter.