



DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO

Office of Worship

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Guide to the Liturgical Year 2026

Parish Solemnities

In every parish the day commemorating the parish's title (patron saint, mystery of the Lord, etc.¹) is celebrated as a solemnity², as is the anniversary of the dedication of that church³ and, in all parishes, the dedication of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament.⁴

Year A: Matthew

The position of the Gospel according to Matthew as the first of the four gospels in the New Testament reflects both the view that it was the first to be written, a view that goes back to the late second century A.D., and the esteem in which it was held by the church; no other was so frequently quoted in the noncanonical literature of earliest Christianity. Although the majority of scholars now reject the opinion about the time of its composition, the high estimation of this work remains. The reason for that becomes clear upon study of the way in which Matthew presents his story of Jesus, the demands of Christian discipleship, and the breaking-in of the new and final age through the ministry but particularly through the death and resurrection of Jesus.⁵

Advent

The Advent Wreath

Promoting practices like lighting Advent Wreaths in the domestic church helps the Faithful celebrate the mysteries of Christ. It may be blessed at home by a parent⁶, so it is helpful to provide families access to the prayer or refer them to *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* or the USCCB website⁷. During Mass the Wreath is blessed after the Universal Prayer during the first Mass celebrated in Advent. It may be placed in the sanctuary so long as it does not block the view of the altar, ambo, or chair⁸. This particular blessing could be repeated at all the First Sunday of Advent liturgies. Despite the title of the blessing, both options for the prayer invoke a blessing upon "us" as we light the candles, rather than upon the wreath itself. Lighting the

¹ *The Order of the Dedication of a Church and an Altar* Chapter II #4

² *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar* #59(4)(c)

³ *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar* #59(4)(b)

⁴ *Diocesan Statutes* #123 §2(a)

⁵ <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/matthew/0>

⁶ *Book of Blessings* #1514

⁷ <https://www.usccb.org/prayers/blessing-advent-wreath> or <https://www.usccb.org/es/prayers/bendicion-de-la-corona-de-adviento>

⁸ *Book of Blessings* #1512

candles without the blessing is envisioned in the rite only for the “Second and succeeding Sundays of Advent”.⁹ On these days it is lighted “either before Mass begins or immediately before the opening prayer”.¹⁰

Advent Penance Services

The Rite of Penance includes sample penitential services for Advent.¹¹ When the Sacrament of Penance is celebrated in these services, “after the readings and Homily, and The Order for Reconciling Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution (nos. 54-59) is used. . .”.¹²

Simbang Gabi

The traditional Simbang Gabi novena of Masses in the Diocese of Sacramento adheres to the liturgical guidelines appropriate to the Season of Advent. The readings and prayers are taken from the Mass of the Day. Vestments are violet (or, optionally, rose on Gaudete Sunday). The Gloria should not be sung at Simbang Gabi Masses except on Solemnities. The Creed is only recited when indicated by the Ordo, such as at Sunday Masses and Solemnities.

Christmas

Like the Advent Wreath, the Christmas crèche may be blessed at the beginning of its respective liturgical season, but it must not be placed in the presbyterium.¹³ Here again it is worth encouraging families to celebrate the liturgical rite of blessing for the manger or nativity scene at their home. If a Christmas Tree is used in the church it may be blessed as well, as may Christmas Trees used in the home, as well as the home itself,¹⁴ according to the respective liturgical rites.

Optional Memorial of St. Blase (February 3)

The blessing of throats may take place in Mass after the Universal Prayer, as part of a brief celebration of the Word of God, or during Morning or Evening Prayer following before the gospel canticle¹⁵. The candles used for the blessing should be blessed the day before.¹⁶

Lent and Easter

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, a season in which the faithful are called to reflect on the Paschal Mystery more intently. It is a time of spiritual renewal and to examine one’s relationship with God and others more carefully. It is also a time in which catechumens prepare to receive the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil. The Church calls everyone, therefore, to a spirit of penance through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

Ash Wednesday

“The blessing and distribution of ashes on Ash Wednesday normally takes place during the celebration of Mass. However, when circumstances require, the blessing and distribution of ashes may take place apart from Mass, during a celebration of the word of God.”¹⁷ In this case the “rite may be celebrated by a priest or deacon who may be assisted by lay ministers in the distribution of the ashes. The blessing of the ashes,

⁹ *Book of Blessings* #1513

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Rite of Penance* Appendix II, II

¹² *Order of Penance* Appendix II, “Preparing Penitential Celebrations”, #4

¹³ *Book of Blessings* #1544

¹⁴ *Book of Blessings*, “Order for the Blessing of Homes During the Christmas and Easter Seasons”

¹⁵ *Book of Blessings* #1626

¹⁶ *Book of Blessings* #1627

¹⁷ *Book of Blessings* #1656

however, is reserved to a priest or deacon.”¹⁸ A description of this liturgy is found in the Roman Missal, at the end of the proper for Ash Wednesday.

Fasting and Abstinence

In order to foster a spirit of repentance and unite us more closely to Christ, Church law requires the observance of Abstinence and Fasting during Lent.¹⁹ (For further study, see Pope Paul VI’s apostolic constitution on the subject.²⁰)

Abstinence

All persons 14 years and older are obliged to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, all Fridays of Lent, and Good Friday. “. . . [Any] parish or diocesan institution or group which sponsors an event which includes a meal is not to serve meat on any Friday during the year”.²¹ Other forms of abstinence, for example abstinence from alcoholic beverages, television, video games, the internet, and social media, are also beneficial.

Fasting

Everyone from ages 18 to 59 is obliged to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Voluntary fasting on other weekdays of Lent, especially on Wednesdays and Fridays, is highly recommended. Fasting is understood to mean that one full meal may be eaten. Two other small meals may be eaten, but together they should not equal a full meal. Eating between meals is not permitted.

When health or ability to work would be seriously affected, neither the law of fasting nor the law of abstinence obliges. If in doubt, one’s parish priest or confessor should be consulted. Airport workers, travelers, and others while on board ships or airplanes are dispensed from the laws of fast and abstinence for the duration of their journey (except on Good Friday). It is desirable that they perform some other pious act instead.

Prayer

Catholics are urged to read and pray with Sacred Scripture more intently during Lent, and to deepen their faith by reading the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The faithful are encouraged to participate in special devotions offered by the parish, especially parish penance services, Eucharistic adoration, and Liturgy of the Hours. Other devotions such as the Rosary, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and praying for vocations to the priesthood and religious life are also encouraged. Holy water remains available in the stoops throughout Lent, until the Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper begins the Easter Triduum.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

Lent is a privileged time for celebrating the Sacrament of Penance. The faithful are obliged to confess their grave sins at least once a year.²² To that end, parishes are encouraged to provide ample opportunity for the faithful to partake of the Sacrament of Reconciliation by expanding their confession schedule during Lent. You might consider, for example, adding an extra rite of reconciliation on a weekday evening. Public parish penance services are strongly encouraged and may be combined with the Roman “stations” with or without a procession.²³ General absolution, however, is not permitted.

¹⁸ *Book of Blessings* #1659

¹⁹ *Code of Canon Law* #1249-1253

²⁰ *Apostolic Constitution Paenitemini of the Supreme Pontiff Paul VI on Fast and Abstinence*

²¹ *Diocesan Statutes* #127

²² *Code of Canon Law* #989

²³ *Roman Missal*, Proper of Time, Lent (introduction #1-2); see also *Rite of Penance* Appendix II, I

Lenten Mass Schedule

The faithful are urged to attend Mass on weekdays as often as possible, especially during Lent. Daily Masses during Lent should be scheduled to facilitate attendance.

The Stations of the Cross

The Stations of the Cross are to be celebrated in each parish on Fridays during Lent and parishioners should be encouraged to participate.

Day of Reconciliation and Unity

The second Wednesday of March is to be observed as “[a] day of penance for negative attitudes and discrimination toward people of differing cultures, ethnicity and race; and prayer for unity in our diversity, for equality, mutual respect and peace among all peoples”.²⁴

Wedding Masses

Ritual Masses for the Celebration of Marriage may not take place on Ash Wednesday, on Sundays of Lent, during Holy Week, during the Paschal Triduum, or on Sundays of Easter.²⁵ “The celebration of Marriage on Friday of the Passion of the Lord and on Holy Saturday is to be avoided altogether.”²⁶ Marriages may take place at other times during Lent according to the proper liturgical norms and provisions. It is contrary to the penitential spirit of the season to have elaborate weddings or lavish receptions. Those who need to have marriages convalidated before the Easter Vigil should do so prior to Holy Week, not on Holy Saturday or during the Vigil.

Funeral Masses

Funerals are not to be celebrated on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, or Holy Saturday, nor on the Sundays of Lent. When pastoral considerations necessitate that a funeral be celebrated on these days, the Liturgy of the Word with the Final Commendation and Farewell may be conducted.

Paschal Triduum

No Masses are to be offered on Good Friday nor on Holy Saturday except the Easter Vigil in the Holy Night. The Easter Vigil begins after nightfall which in our diocese is 8:30 p.m. this year.²⁷ There may be only one celebration of the Easter Vigil in a given parish each year. For additional helpful information beyond what is provided in the Roman Missal, see the related Circular Letter.²⁸ “It is unlawful to separate the Confirmation and reception of Eucharist of any adult or child of catechetical age from Baptism. (see CIC 866)”²⁹

Easter Duty

All Catholics who have been initiated into the Holy Eucharist are bound to receive holy communion worthily at least once during the Easter Season. In the United States, the Easter duty may be fulfilled through the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. Catholics are encouraged to receive Communion as often as possible, not only during Eastertide, but throughout the year. However, “[anyone] conscious of a grave sin must receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to Communion”.³⁰

²⁴ *Diocesan Statutes* #123 §3(c)

²⁵ *Roman Missal*, 2011, Ritual Masses, V. For the Celebration of Marriage

²⁶ *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, 2016, #32

²⁷ <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year-and-calendar/triduum/roman-missal-and-the-easter-vigil> (see footnote 1)

²⁸ *Circular Letter Concerning Preparation and Celebration of Easter Feasts*, Congregation for Divine Worship, 1988

²⁹ *Guidelines for the Implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults for the Diocese of Sacramento*, October 2016, #103.6.2.

³⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1385

Almsgiving

From earliest times giving to the poor, or almsgiving, has been an invaluable spiritual practice, a religious duty, a form of penance, an expression of Christian charity, and an aid to interior conversion. Therefore, all Catholics are urged to give generously to assist the poor and support the charitable works of the Church, especially through their local parish and the Annual Catholic Appeal.

The faithful are also encouraged to visit the sick, the homebound, the aged, and those in prison, remembering the words of our Lord Jesus Christ who said, “whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). Fasting and abstinence together with almsgiving and charitable works unite us to the crucified Christ reflected in the image of our brothers and sisters who suffer.

Covering Crosses and Images

In the Dioceses of the United States the practice of covering crosses and images throughout the church from this [Fifth Sunday of Lent] may be observed. Crosses remain covered until the end of the Celebration of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday, but images remain covered until the beginning of the Easter Vigil.³¹

Initiation

The Christian Initiation of adults and children of catechetical age includes at one celebration: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. In accord with the ancient practice of the Church, these sacraments are to be received together and in their proper order.³²

Anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral (June 28)

Both the prayers and readings for the Mass come from the Common of the Dedication of a Church on the Anniversary of the Dedication, in commemoration of the anniversary of the dedication of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament (in accordance with Diocesan Statutes 123(2)(a)). Option II has the prayers for non-Cathedral parishes. For the readings, each parish is free to select from the options provided for the Common of the Dedication of a Church, found in the Lectionary for Ritual Masses.

For Liturgy of the Hours, the Common of the Dedication of a Church is used.

All Souls Day

The remembrance of loved ones who have died is important for Christian spirituality. On All Souls Day consider utilizing means beyond the liturgical celebration to recognize the deceased. These means might include tolling the bells, utilizing a Book of Names of Dead, or posting a commemoration on the parish website and social media.

Devotions

The various forms of healthy popular piety found in the diverse communities of our diocese are an important part of our spirituality. They often flow with the liturgical year and provide opportunities for catechesis, sometimes of people who do not otherwise often come to liturgical celebrations. For further reading on these opportunities for evangelization, see the *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*.³³

³¹ *Roman Missal*, instruction for the Fifth Sunday of Lent

³² *Guidelines for the Implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults for the Diocese of Sacramento*, October 2016, #103.6.1

³³ *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines*, Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 2001

The complete Diocesan Liturgical Calendar can be found at <https://www.scd.org/worship/liturgical-calendar>.

Updated December 9, 2025