

**St Michael
& All Angels**
with St James
Croydon

**The Saints
and the
Major Feasts
of the Liturgical Year**

Catechesis Course 2021

The Feasts of the Church have been instituted so as to render God, in common in the holy temples, the supreme worship of adoration, praise, thanksgiving and reparation. In them everything has been so well disposed and adapted to the circumstances—the ceremonies, the words, the singing, the outward ordering in all its details—that they can make the mysteries, truths or acts which we celebrate penetrate deeply into the mind and bring us to corresponding feelings and actions. If the faithful were well instructed in this matter and celebrated the feasts in the spirit desired by the Church when she instituted them, a renewal and a notable increase of faith, of piety, of religious instruction would be obtained, and, in consequence, the interior life of Christians would be found to be reanimated and improved.

Pope Saint Pius X, 1913

INTRODUCTION:

In this Catechesis Course we will look at 5 of the major feasts or seasons of the Liturgical Year (Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Corpus Christi and All Saints) by taking a look at a text written by one of the saints and now read at the Office of Readings (part of the daily prayer of the Church). We hope that this will help us all to come to a deeper appreciation of the events of our salvation.

We will meet on Wednesday's at 11am in Church and discuss the text of the week. No prior knowledge is necessary, and each week will be stand-alone. We look forward to seeing you.

The readings are:

	<u>Feast</u>	<u>Saint and Reading</u>	<u>When in the Office of Readings;</u>
Week 1	Christmas	S. Leo the Great – A sermon ‘O Christian Be Aware of Your Nobility	Christmas Day
Week 2	Easter	S. Augustine – A Sermon ‘A New Creation in Christ’	Octave Day of Easter
Week 3	Pentecost	S. Irenaeus – <i>Against Heresies</i> : ‘The Sending of the Holy Spirit’	The Solemnity of Pentecost
Week 4	Corpus Christi	S. Thomas Aquinas – ‘ <i>How precious and wonderful is this banquet</i> ’.	The Solemnity of Corpus Christi
Week 5	All Saints	S. Bernard – A Sermon ‘Let us make haste to our brothers: they await us’	The Solemnity of All Saints

Week 1

THE NATIVITY OF JESUS CHRIST (CHRISTMAS)

Saint Leo the Great - From one of his Sermons -

'O Christian, Be Aware of Your Dignity'

This reading is used on Christmas Day

This is the day our saviour was born: what a joy for us, my beloved" This is no season for sadness, this, the birthday of Life - the Life which annihilates the fear of death, and engenders joy, promising, as it does, immortality.

Nobody is an outsider to happiness. The same cause for joy is common to all, for as our Lord found nobody free from guilt when he came to bring an end to death and to sin, so he came with redemption for all. Let the saint rejoice, for he hastens to his crown; let the sinner be filled with joy, for pardon is offered him; let the Gentile be emboldened, for he is called to life.

When the designated time had come, which God in his deep and impenetrable plan had fixed upon, God's Son took the nature of man upon himself in order to reconcile death, be himself overcome by that self-same human nature which he had overcome.

The angels therefore exult at the birth of the Lord: they sing 'Glory to God in high heaven' they announce 'Peace on earth for men on whom his favour rests'. For they behold the heavenly Jerusalem being constructed from out of all the peoples on earth. How greatly ought ere men rejoice at this mysterious undertaking of divine love, when the angels on high thrill so much at it!

My beloved, let us offer thanksgiving to God the Father, through his Son, in the Holy Spirit. In the great mercy with which he loved us, he had pity on us, and 'in giving life to Christ, gave life to us too, when we were dead through sin,' so that in him we might be a new creation, a new work of his hands.

Let us then quit of the old self and the habits that went with it. Sharers now in the birth of Christ, let us break with the deeds of the flesh.

O Christian, be aware of your nobility - it is God's own nature that you share: do not then, by an ignoble life, fall back into your former baseness. Think of the Head, think of the Body of which you are a member. Recall that you have been rescued from the power of darkness, and have been transferred to the light of God, the kingdom of God.

Through the sacrament of baptism, you have been made a temple of the Holy Spirit; do not, by evil deeds, drive so great an indweller away from you, submitting yourself once more to the slavery of the devil. For you were bought at the price of Christ's blood.

Week 2

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST (EASTER)

*Saint Augustine - From one of his sermons -
'A New Creation in Christ'*

This reading is used on the Octave Day of Easter.

I address myself to you, newly-baptized infants, little ones in Christ, new offspring of the Church, grace of the Father, fruitfulness of the Mother's womb, holy Children, new swarm, flower of our honour, and fruit of our labour, my joy and my crown, all of you who stand upright before the Lord.

I address to you the words of the Apostle: 'Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires', so that you may put on the life which you have put on by this sacrament. 'For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.'

Such is the efficacy of this sacrament. It is the sacrament of the new life which begins at the present time by the forgiveness of all past sins, but will only be completed in the resurrection of the dead. We have been buried with Christ by baptism into death, so that as Christ has arisen from the dead, we too may walk in newness of life.

Now you walk by faith, as long as you journey in this mortal body far from the Lord. But Jesus Christ towards whom you are moving is a sure way. He is this in his humanity which he took on for us. He has in reserve an abundance of sweetness for those who fear him, which he

will manifest and perfect in those who hope in him, when we shall receive in reality what we have now received in hope.

Today is the octave day of your birth; today is perfect in you the seal of faith which was given among your fathers of old on the eighth day after physical birth through physical circumcision. So too the Lord himself by rising cut away mortality from the flesh and raised up, not a different body but one that would die no more. This he did on the Lord's day, the third day after his passion, the eighth day after the Sabbath, which is also the first.

So you have not yet received in fact the glory of the resurrection but you have the sure hope of receiving it since you have the sacrament of that reality and the pledge of the Spirit. 'If you have risen with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.'

Week 3
THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (PENTECOST SUNDAY)

*St Irenaeus – From his treatise ‘Against the Heresies’ –
‘The Sending of the Holy Spirit’
This reading is used on the Feast of Pentecost*

When the Lord gave to the disciples power to confer rebirth into the life of God, he said ‘Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’

He promised through his prophets that he would pour out this Spirit in the last times on his servants and handmaidens so that they would prophesy. And so the Spirit came down on the Son of God, who became the Son of man, and with him became accustomed to dwell in the human race and to abide in God’s creation, within men, working the Father’s will among them and making their old natures new with the newness of Christ.

Luke says that at Pentecost, after the ascension of the Lord, the Spirit came down on the disciples with power to grant all nations entry into life, and to open the new testament. And so in every language they sang a hymn to God in unison; for the Spirit brought the scattered races together into a unity, and offered to the Father the first fruits of all the nations.

Therefore the Lord promised to send us the Holy Spirit to make us fit for God’s purposes. Just as dry flour cannot coalesce into a lump of dough, still less a loaf, without moisture, so we too, being many, could not become one

in Christ Jesus without the water which comes from heaven. And just as dry soil cannot bear fruit unless it receives moisture, so we, who to begin with are dry wood, can never bear the fruit of life unless the rain from heaven falls upon our wills.

For our bodies through the water of baptism have received the unity which leads to freedom from corruption; but our souls have received it through the Spirit.

The Spirit of God came down on the Lord, 'the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and devotion, the Spirit of fear of the Lord'. He gave the same Spirit again to the Church, sending the Counsellor to every nation from heaven, from which the Lord said, 'the devil was cast down like lightning'. Accordingly, we need God's dew, so as not to be burnt up and made unfruitful but rather to have a Counsellor when we have an accuser. For the Lord entrusts to the Holy Spirit his man who had fallen among thieves. Taking pity on him he has bound up his wounds, and given two imperial coins, stamped with the image of the Spirit and the inscription of the Father and the Son. We are to accept them, and make the coin entrusted to us bear fruit and multiple for the Lord.

Week 4

THE SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST PRECIOUS BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST (CORPUS CHRISTI)

St Thomas Aquinas - From one of his works -

'O Precious and wonderful banquet'

This reading is used on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi

Since it was the will of God's only-begotten Son that men should share in his divinity, he assumed our nature in order that by becoming man he might make men gods. Moreover, when he took our flesh he dedicated the whole of its substance to our salvation. He offered his body to God the Father on the altar of the cross as a sacrifice for our reconciliation. He shed his blood for our ransom and purification, so that we might be redeemed from our wretched state of bondage and cleansed from all sin. But to ensure that the memory of so great a gift would abide with us for ever, he left his body as food and his blood as drink for the faithful to consume in the form of bread and wine.

O precious and wonderful banquet, that brings us salvation and contains all sweetness! Could anything be of more intrinsic value? Under the old law it was the flesh of calves and goats that was offered, but here Christ himself, the true God, is set before us as our food. What could be more wonderful than this? No other sacrament has greater healing power; through it sins are purged away, virtues are increased, and the soul is enriched with an abundance of every spiritual gift. It is offered in the Church for the living and the dead, so that what was instituted for the salvation of all may be for the benefit of

all. Yet, in the end, no one can fully express the sweetness of this sacrament, in which spiritual delight is tasted at its very source, and in which we renew the memory of that surpassing love for us which Christ revealed in his passion.

It was to impress the vastness of this love more firmly upon the hearts of the faithful that our Lord instituted this sacrament at the Last Supper. As he was on the point of leaving the world to go to the Father, after celebrating the Passover with his disciples, he left it as a perpetual memorial of his passion. It was the fulfilment of ancient figures and the greatest of all his miracles, while for those who were to experience the sorrow of his departure, it was destined to be a unique and abiding consolation.

Week 5

THE SOLEMNITY OF ALL SAINTS

St Bernard - From one of his sermons -

'Let us make haste to our brethren who are awaiting us'.

This reading is used on the Solemnity of All Saints

Why should our praise and glorification, or even the celebration of this feast day mean anything to the saints? What do they care about earthly honours when their heavenly Father honours them by fulfilling the faithful promise of the Son? What does our commendation mean to them? The saints have no need of honour from us; neither does our devotion add the slightest thing to what is theirs. Clearly, if we venerate their memory, it serves us, not them. But I tell you, when I think of them, I feel myself inflamed by a tremendous yearning.

Calling the saints to mind inspires, or rather arouses in us, above all else, a longing to enjoy their company, so desirable in itself. We long to share in the citizenship of heaven, to dwell with the spirits of the blessed, to join the assembly of patriarchs, the ranks of the prophets, the council of apostles, the great host of martyrs, the noble company of confessors and the choir of virgins. In short, we long to be united in happiness with all the saints. But our dispositions change. The Church of all the first followers of Christ awaits us, but we do nothing about it. The saints want us to be with them, and we are indifferent. The souls of the just await us, and we ignore them.

Come, brothers, let us at length spur ourselves on. We must rise again with Christ, we must seek the world

which is above and set our mind on the things of heaven. Let us long for those who are longing for us, hasten to those who are waiting for us, and ask those who look for our coming to intercede for us. We should not only want to be with the saints, we should also hope to possess their happiness. While we desire to be in their company, we must also earnestly seek to share in their glory. Do not imagine that there is anything harmful in such an ambition as this; there is no danger in setting our hearts on such glory.

When we commemorate the saints we are inflamed with another yearning: that Christ our life may also appear to us as he appeared to them and that we may one day share in his glory. Until then we see him, not as he is, but as he became for our sake. He is our head, crowned, not with glory, but with the thorns of our sins. As members of that head, crowned with thorns, we should be ashamed to live in luxury; his purple robes are a mockery rather than an honour. When Christ comes again, his death shall no longer be proclaimed, and we shall know that we also have died, and that our life is hidden with him. The glorious head of the Church will appear and his glorified members will shine in splendour with him, when he forms this lowly body anew into such glory as belongs to himself, its head.

Therefore, we should aim at attaining this glory with a wholehearted and prudent desire. That we may rightly hope and strive for such blessedness, we must above all seek the prayers of the saints. Thus, what is beyond our own powers to obtain will be granted through their intercession.

