

**‘For everything a season’:  
Theology through the church year**  
Session 12: Ordinary Time  
*Green is for growth*



The year of the Church settles into the time of growth, the Season of the Year sometimes called ‘Ordinary Time’. But this longest phase of the year of grace is in no sense ‘ordinary’. The dignity of Sunday ... is meant to shine forth, prolonging the joy of Easter and Pentecost, to celebrate the whole mystery of Christ. (Elliott, p. 167)

## 1. Ordinary Time

The rhythm of the church year reflects the rhythm of life, with celebrations of anniversaries and special days alongside quieter seasons of rest and growth. ‘Ordinary time’ refers to periods of the church year that fall outside the observance of festivals (‘seasonal time’). A short period of ordinary time falls between Candlemas and the beginning of Lent. A longer period falls between Trinity Sunday and All Saints Day. Ordinary time is not ‘ordinary’ in the sense of ‘mundane’, but ‘ordinary’ in the sense of ‘ordered’, a regular pattern of weeks and months (‘ordinary’ is from ‘ordinal’ – a way of counting first, second, third, etc.). The Latin term for ordinary time is *tempus per annum* meaning ‘time throughout the year’. The colour is green, for growth, renewal, hope, and life.

### 1.1 The dignity of Sunday

Sunday, the Lord’s Day (*Dominica*) is ‘the foundation and nucleus of the whole liturgical year’ (*Second Vatican Council*). The ‘first day of the week’ is the day of resurrection (Mark 16.2), and since earliest times Christians have met on Sundays to worship and ‘break bread’ (Acts 20.7)—‘we do not know of a Sunday on which the Eucharist was not celebrated’ (Cobb, p. 457). Sunday also became a day of rest from 321AD onwards, when Constantine closed the law-courts and stopped other work from taking place. Ordinary time allows time to focus on the dignity and importance of Sunday.

### 1.2 Saints and festivals

Saints’ days are observed during the liturgical year through a parallel calendar of saints called the ‘Sanctoral’. This arose through the need to honour the many Christian martyrs of the early church, and has been broadened over time to honour many other holy men and women. Festivals and Sundays usually take precedence over saints’ days, but there is more scope to observe saints’ days during the Sundays of ordinary time. Many festivals fall during ordinary time: *Dedication Festival, Bible Sunday, Embertide, Creationtide, Lammastide, Harvest*.

### 1.3 Lectionary themes

Ordinary time provides opportunities for particular books of the Bible to be read in depth across a three-year period. We follow a three-year lectionary cycle, with a synoptic gospel author given prominence in each year (Matthew (A), Mark (B), Luke (C)). During year B, readings from the gospel of John are also filtered in. The revised common lectionary is an ecumenical Protestant adaption of the Roman Catholic Vatican II Lectionary for Mass. It provides two options for reading the Old Testament in ordinary time: the *continuous* option (reading continuously through Old Testament books); the *related* option (allowing the gospel passage to control the choice of Old Testament reading). The continuous option has the advantage of enabling the Old Testament to be understood on its own terms in keeping with its canonical integrity. The related option has the advantage of unifying the readings around the paschal mystery.

### 2. A time to grow

Here are some suggestions for growth in ordinary time, inspired by the lectionary readings:<sup>1</sup>

- *A time to believe* ('Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?', Mark 4.40). How do we deal with doubt and fear in our faith journeys? Pick one early follower of Christ as a guide in our struggles.
- *A time to heal* ('be opened!', Mark 7.34). What healing do we need most at this time? Forgiveness, joy, hope, courage, wisdom, peace? Collect inspiring words to address this healing and inform your prayer.
- *A time to retreat* ('come away to a deserted place and rest awhile' Mark 6.31). Consider a spiritual retreat, a restful holiday, or simply take advantage of the longer evenings to spend time in quiet prayer.
- *A time to give* ('this poor widow put in more than all the other contributions ... she gave from her poverty', Mark 12.43). Can we take time to review how much of our income we give away?
- *A time to feed* ('Jesus took the loaves ...' John 6.11). The story of the loaves and fishes invites us to consider how we might do more to feed others (e.g. supporting the food bank, supporting aid agencies).
- *A time to be fed* ('I am the bread of life' John 6.35). Can we participate more fully in the Eucharist, or spend more time in prayer and reflection before and after we receive the Eucharist?

### Next talk: Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> Nov, 'Thy kingdom come': Kingdom Season

#### References:

Cobb, P. 'The history of the Christian year', in Jones, C. et al, *The Study of Liturgy* (SPCK, 1992), pp. 455-472

Elliott, P. *Ceremonies of the Liturgical Year* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2002)

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.osv.com/OSVNewsweekly/ByIssue/Article/TabId/735/ArtMID/13636/ArticleID/17658/Walking-with-Christ-through-Ordinary-Time.aspx>