Ordinary Time: Experience of Journey

The Season of Ordinary Time is a “split time” of the per annum or “through the year” weeks between the Baptism of the Lord and Ash Wednesday and the weeks after Pentecost. They are the ordered weeks, from 1 – 34, that progress more or less continuously with the companionship of the Gospel of Matthew in Year A of the three-year cycle (Mark in Year B and Luke in Year C). To call these weeks “ordinary” should not imply that this is a dull and uneventful season. Every Sunday is a celebration of the paschal mystery, but the Sundays of the festal season of Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter focus on specific aspects of Christ’s mystery. The Sundays of Ordinary Time embody the ancient tradition of the Church’s celebration of the Lord’s Day before the development of the cycle of solemnities and feasts.


To many of us, the word “ordinary” suggests dull and boring sameness. Nothing could be further from the truth in this Season. The origin of the Latin tempus ordinarii is: ordinal or counted time. The numbering of the Sundays in Ordinary Time is simply the way in which the Church organises its year.

Sundays are the distinguishing mark of the Christian community. Every Sunday is a celebration of the Paschal Mystery. Each Sunday of this Season acts as an echo of Easter Sunday. While each of the special Seasons of the year celebrates a particular aspect of the dying/rising of Christ, the Sundays in Ordinary Time celebrate the mystery of Christ in all its aspects.

Ordinary Time is the period in which God reveals to us the face of Christ through the eyes of Matthew, Mark and Luke. In the 33 (sometimes 34) Sundays of Ordinary Time, some of which occur between Christmas and Lent (depending on the date set for Easter) and the remainder after Pentecost, we get on with the day-to-day faithful living of the Gospel.

The difference is that whereas the other Seasons of the Liturgy are focussed on one major faith event, Ordinary Time simply follows the Gospels. During this period, we hear a semi-continuous proclamation of the Scriptures over the 3-year cycle. It’s as if the evangelists are our guides. Each year, one of them will lead us deeper into the mystery of the mission of Christ in the world.

In Year A:
We meet Jesus the great teacher as introduced by Matthew. In Matthew’s gospel, we find Christ actively present through the Church and the Sacraments.

In Year B:
Mark shows us the mystery of Christ as truly divine and truly human – Son of God and Son of Man. Mark calls us into a response of faith by which we radically choose to leave all to follow Christ and become willing to share our conviction with others.

In Year C:
The ‘social’ gospel of Luke lays before us the practical meaning of following Christ. Luke outlines the role of the disciple and the cost of discipleship in our loving response to the needy and the outcast of society. Luke assures us that the Holy Spirit is always with us as we try to become Good News for our world.

Where, then, is the gospel of John?
While there is no ‘year’ of John, the Church reflects each year on John’s gospel during the Christmas and Easter cycles. John’s gospel gives us a deeper appreciation of the meaning of the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus. He teaches us that Christ is the very source of our life in God.
What is our Christian Tradition?

As a church we benefit from a heritage of celebrating Sundays, seasons, and saints’ days. Many of them are observed throughout the world on the same day; others are more properly local in expression. We could celebrate the paschal mystery without such a multilevel organization of time. Yet the human desires for variety, remembrance, and tradition suggest that calendar keeping is not just a Vatican concern. It is a life process properly enjoyed by Churches at every level and made a part of each Christian’s prayer life. Thus individuals and communities would have a world and faith perspective nourished by rhythms of time and celebrations.

The Liturgical Year: Celebrating the Mystery of Christ and His Saints, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1985.

What does the Church today say?

Apart from those seasons having their own distinctive character, thirty-three or thirty-four weeks remain in the yearly cycle that do not celebrate a specific aspect of the mystery of Christ. Rather, especially on the Sundays, they are devoted to the mystery of Christ in all its aspects. This period is known as Ordinary Time.

General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar #43

The church celebrates the paschal mystery on the first day of the week, known as the Lord’s Day or Sunday. This follows a tradition handed down from the apostles and having its origin from the day of Christ’s resurrection. Thus Sunday must be ranked as the first holyday of all.

General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar #4

Other celebrations, unless they be truly of greatest importance, shall not have precedence over the Sunday, the foundation and core of the whole liturgical year.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy #10

What do the Scriptures say?

from the 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A (Matthew 5: 1-12)

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up the hill. There he sat down and was joined by his disciples. Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them: ‘How happy are the poor in spirit; theirs in the kingdom of heaven.’

from the 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B (Mark 6: 1-6)

Jesus went to his home town and his disciples accompanied him. With the coming of the Sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue and most of them were astonished when they heard him. They said, ‘Where did the man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been granted him, and these miracles that are worked through him? This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary ...?’ And they would not accept him.

from the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C (Luke 14: 1. 7-14)

Then (Jesus) said to his host, ‘When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not ask your friends, brothers, relations or rich neighbours, for fear they repay your courtesy by inviting you in return. No, when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame the blind; ...’

from Pentecost Sunday, Cycle C (John 14: 15-16. 23-26)

‘Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.’
What does all this mean for our Community here and now?

Ordinary Time is an excellent time for us to get our *liturgical house* in order.

This is a time for listening, learning and building up the skills of good liturgical practice in our school and parish communities. It’s actually a ‘growing time’ for our people. Thus, the colour used in Ordinary Time is **green** – to remind us that we are tending new growth as we develop and equip our community for its on-going mission.

We can ask ourselves the following questions with regard to our classroom prayer-skills:

- Are we always extending our repertoire of liturgical music? (eg, by reading various new catalogues and websites for reviews and new materials coming on the market)
- Does our choice of songs reflect the communal nature of ritual? (eg, Liturgy is the *Body of Christ* at prayer. So, liturgical music and texts always use “we” language rather than the “me and God” more personal approach)
- What about responsorial psalms, acclamations and litanies? Does our class know a good selection of each of these genres? Is the ‘psalm’ really a psalm? Are we using ‘age-appropriate’ versions?
- In our ritual celebrations, do we nurture a sacredness of approach to our procession of the Word, to the book itself, and to the place of proclamation?
- Have we ourselves found any relevant reading or information on this year’s gospel? (eg, Do we extend our own Scriptural background through any short courses on DVD or video to open up the perspective of Matthew when we are in Ordinary Time A?)
- How skilled are our students (and we, ourselves) in the art of Silence during the ritual prayer? If we aren’t comfortable with silence ourselves, our students won’t be either.
- How well does our Ritual Prayer flow? (both in the classroom and in the staffroom)
- When we celebrate Eucharist, are we using bread large enough to be broken so that all (or most) may eat of the ONE bread?
- Do we ever use the tabernacle during Mass? Why?
- Do we always offer the Cup?
- Do any of our liturgical objects (cross, candle, Lectionary, carafe/plate, etc) need renewing?
- Is our Ritual Prayer Space neat and welcoming? Do we change the colours and symbols with the appropriate season?
- Do we welcome parents to our classroom prayer?
- Are we willing and generous enough to risk sharing appropriately on a personal level, when invited, during our times of staff prayerfire?
Liturg of the Hours
(an abbreviated version)

Ordinary Time

After the period of Lent and Eastertide, we rejoin the Sundays of Ordinary Time. Of course, these weeks are not “ordinary” in the common sense of that word. Rather, these Sundays are “ordered” by number. We begin these ‘ordered’ Sundays after the feast of the Epiphany until Lent/Easter begins. We rejoin the Sundays in Ordinary Time after the feast of the Body & Blood of Christ.

We have put much time and energy into the ‘Great 90 Days’ (40 days of Lent + 50 days of Easter). We can gladly think of Ordinary Time as a pause when we literally get things back into order in our parish routine after our busy efforts during Lent through to Pentecost. Ordinary Time is the perfect period to build up our skills (and our spirits) for ministry.

Seen this way, Ordinary Time can become a wonderful ‘growing’ time for the whole of the community. It is during Ordinary Time that the Paschal Mystery is developed and lived. We hear a more continuous reading of the Scriptures – Matthew for Cycle A; Mark for Cycle B; and Luke for Cycle C – and we hear semi-continuous readings from the letters of St Paul and the books of the Old Testament

Ordinary Time ends with the feast of Christ the King. Then we begin a whole new Cycle of Scripture with the 1st Sunday of Advent.

Outline of Prayer

Gather:
Welcome
Invitation to Prayer & Praise of the Trinity
Opening Song (own choice)

Listen:
Psalmody (one psalm only)
Scripture Reading

Respond:
Silence (pauses)
Intercessions
Lord’s Prayer
Closing Prayer

Go forth:
Blessing
Dismissal

You will need:

✓ A Leader; a Reader; a person to manage the music.
✓ The group may be seated in ‘choir’ ie, two sides facing each other ... the group needs to know beforehand, ‘who’ is the Left side and ‘who’ is the Right side. The Leader can decide and tell the group at the Welcome time.
✓ A full text for all present (suggestion: insert A4 sheets into plastic folders. The above summary could be included though it is not read aloud during the prayer).
✓ The chosen Scripture Reading (separate folder) or proclaimed from the Lectionary or bible and set near the candles. The Reader goes to the book and proclaims from the middle of the space, if possible.
✓ Words of the chosen opening song (as an insert) + CD and player if needed.
✓ Prayer space set up in the usual way with head, heart and hands candles already alight.
✓ The colour for this Season is green – the shade can be varied.
Leader: Welcome to *Liturgy of the Hours* adapted for the ....... week of Ordinary Time.

O God, come to our aid.

All: O Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to you, Source of all Being,
Eternal Word, and Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning is now,
and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen.

Hymn: Choose a suitable song to begin the Liturgy today ...
*Suggestion: Seasons of the Heart*
... the words could be inserted into the prayer folders in the space below (with the appropriate acknowledgements).
Psalmody: Psalm 27

Left side: The Lord is my saving light; whom should I fear? God is my fortress; what should I dread?

Right side: When the violent come at me to eat me alive, a mob eager to kill - they waver, they collapse.

Left: Should battalions lay siege, I will not fear; should war rage against me, even then I will trust.

Right: One thing I ask the Lord, one thing I seek; to live in the house of God every day of my life, caught up in God's beauty, at prayer in his temple.

Left: The Lord will hide me there, hide my life from attack; a sheltering tent above me, a firm rock below.

Right: I am now beyond reach of those who besiege me. In his temple I will offer a joyful sacrifice, I will play and sing to God.

Left: O God, listen to me; be gracious, answer me. Deep within me a voice says, "Look for the face of God!"

Right: So I look for your face, I beg you not to hide. Do not shut me out in anger, help me instead.

Left: Do not abandon or desert me, my saviour, my God. If my parents rejected me, still God would take me in.

Right: Teach me how to live, lead me on the right road, away from my enemies. Do not leave me to their malice; liars breathing violence rise to swear against me.

Left: I know I will see how good God is while I am still alive. Trust in the Lord. Be strong. Be brave. Trust in the Lord.

The English translation of Psalm 27 from The Liturgical Psalter © 1994, ICEL Inc. All rights reserved.

SHORT PAUSE

Scripture: Choose an extract (just a few verses) from the Scripture of the particular Day OR from the Sunday of this week …

PAUSE FOR SILENT REFLECTION …
Intercessions:

Leader: In confidence we call upon you, O God, and so we pray:

Reader 1: Fountain of Love, you provide water for the thirsty;
All: - may we always give thanks for your endless gifts.

Reader 2: Comforting God, in your mercy you drive away our fears;
All: - help us to reach beyond the fears that keep us imprisoned.

Reader 3: Faithful Companion, you walk with us along our journey;
All: - enable us to accept the diversities among us and to bless all who walk, with integrity, a different road from our own.

Reader 4: Liberating God, you make the desert bloom and bring hope and beauty to us;
All: - free us to bring beauty and hope to people in need of refreshment.

Leader: Let us join all our prayers in the words that Jesus taught us:
All: Our Father ...

Closing Prayer:

Leader: Let us pray ..........
O God, author of all truth,
we rejoice in the faith that draws us together,
aware that selfishness can drive us apart.
Let your encouragement be our constant strength.
Keep us true in the love that has sealed our lives,
as we seek to live the Gospel we profess.
We ask this in Jesus’ name
and in the power of the Holy Spirit.
All: Amen.

Blessing & Dismissal:

Leader: May the God of Mercy keep us from all harm and bless us with every good gift.
All: Amen.

All: May the Word of God live in our hearts and fill us with lasting joy.
All: Amen.

All: May we walk in God’s ways, always knowing what is right and good.
All: Amen.

All: May almighty God bless us, ¶ the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
All: Amen.

Leader: Go in the peace of Christ.
All: Thanks be to God.