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Honoring Veterans on November 11

Q.: What are some ways we could honor our veterans on or near November 11?

A.: While there is no “official” blessing or prayer that is used to recognize and thank those who have served in the armed forces, there are a few options for this day or the weekend nearest to it:

- ✘ The simplest method is to include a petition in the Prayer of the Faithful at Mass for our veterans;
- ✘ also at Mass, Solemn Blessings #12 and 13 speak of the blessings of peace, and safety from adversity;
- ✘ Chapters 70-71 in the Book of Blessings could be adapted to give thanks for their service;
- ✘ November 11 is also the Memorial of Saint Martin of Tours, patron of soldiers. Perhaps a prayer card or medal of the saint could be blessed and given to veterans this day or the weekend before.

Many thanks to all who have served our country in this way.

Liturgical Options for Thanksgiving

Q.: What are the liturgical options available for Thanksgiving Day?

A.: There are several options available to us. On the liturgical calendar, November 28 is Thursday of the 34th week in Ordinary Time, with no other feast day on the calendar (ferial day). So the Mass of the day could always be celebrated.

For Thanksgiving, the *Roman Missal* also provides proper prayers for Masses on Thanksgiving Day, complete with its own proper Preface. These are found in the Proper of Saints at the end of November. The readings may be from the day or could be taken from the section “In Thanksgiving to God,” nos. 943-947 of the *Lectioary for Mass* (volume IV). These proper prayers and readings may be used at the discretion of the pastor or priest celebrant.

In addition, the *Book of Blessings* provides a blessing of food for Thanksgiving Day, which may be used in or out of Mass. See chapter 58, nos. 1755-1780, for the full order of service.

Of course, every Mass is the greatest celebration of thanksgiving we can hope to offer (the word “Eucharist” coming from the Greek word *eucharistia*, meaning “thanksgiving”).

December Calendar Notes—A Week with the BVM

In a span of five days in December, we will have the opportunity celebrate the Blessed Virgin Mary under three distinct titles. In the year our diocese was consecrated to her Immaculate Heart, let us celebrate our Blessed Mother!

December 8—The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Under normal circumstances, this would be a holy day of obligation. It is our national feast day, with the United States under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary, celebrating her Immaculate Conception. Since the Solemnity takes precedent over Memorials and Feasts, Masses the evening of Wednesday, December 7 (Memorial of Saint Ambrose) would be anticipatory Masses for the Immaculate Conception. There are not proper vigil Mass prayers and readings for this Solemnity.

December 10—Our Lady of Loreto

In 2019, Pope Francis ordered the inscription of Our Lady of Loreto into the General Roman Calendar as an optional Memorial on December 10 (the day her feast is celebrated in Loreto). While this is reflected in the new *ordo*, the texts for Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours will not show up in their place in the Proper of Saints. Please visit the “[Mass](#)” section of the Office of Worship website for more information on how to celebrate the liturgies this day.

December 12—Our Lady of Guadalupe

Recalling the apparitions to Saint Juan Diego (who was celebrated December 9), the Blessed Virgin Mary is patroness of all the Americas under this title. As a proper Feast, the *Gloria* would be sung/said this day. However, any Masses after 4 pm would be the anticipatory Masses for the Third Sunday of Advent (*Gaudete* Sunday), and evening prayer would be taken from Evening Prayer I for Sunday, as the Advent Sunday is of higher rank than a Feast (or Solemnity, for that matter).

*O Mary, conceived without sin,
pray for us who have recourse to you!*

Advent Wreaths

Q.: What is the most appropriate place for the Advent wreath in the church?

A.: Advent wreaths, in terms of usage in churches, are a relatively recent development. This Germanic custom has become the customary reminder that the Advent season is upon us and stands as a visual reminder of our anticipation of the celebration of the Nativity at Christmas.

There is actually some leeway as to the placement and usage of the Advent wreath. Traditionally, the wreath consists of three violet candles and one rose candle that correspond to the Sundays of Advent. However, one may use four candles of the same color. A new candle is then lit for every Sunday of Advent.

While there is no hard and fast rule for the placement of the wreath, there are some basic guidelines for its usage:

- ✘ It should be of a suitable size for the space – do not use a small tabletop wreath for your church, but also do not use an oppressively large wreath that overwhelms everything around it, either.
- ✘ It may be placed in the sanctuary, at the entrance of the church, in another visible location or devotional chapel in the church proper, or perhaps even suspended from the ceiling.
- ✘ Wherever it is placed, it should never obscure or interfere with the action of the Mass or other liturgies that are celebrated in the church. It also should not replace the altar candles or the Easter candle.

The blessing of the Advent wreath may take place on the first Sunday of Advent in the context of Mass, Liturgy of the Hours, or a Liturgy of the Word. Ideally, the wreath should only be blessed at one liturgy and not repeatedly blessed over the course of a weekend. For all subsequent uses of the Advent wreath, the appropriate candles may be lit either before Mass or other liturgy, or just before the Collect of Mass.

For more information on blessing, placement, and usage, please see Chapter 47 of the *Book of Blessings*.

Book of Blessings and the Christmas Season

While the official liturgical season that is Christmas is relatively short, there are several liturgical blessings particular to the season that are good to recognize and celebrate. The *Book of Blessings* (BB) and *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* (HB) provide the content.

Blessing of Nativity: BB, chapter 48; HB, pg. 78—Probably the most obvious blessing is the blessing the nativity scene or manger, either at the parish or at home. Chapter 48 of BB provides the Order for blessing the nativity either in or out of Mass. It would seem to make sense that the nativity be blessed only once over the course of the Christmas liturgies, ideally at the first Mass of Christmas Eve or prior to it. However, it could also be revered with incense at any subsequent Christmas liturgies, perhaps during the incensing of the altar and cross at the Entrance. The shorter form in BB is the same as what is found in HB for blessing the home nativity.

Blessing of a Christmas Tree: BB, chapter 49; HB, pg. 78—Both BB and HB also provide a blessing for the Christmas tree (BB, chapter 49; HB, pg. 78). Trees set up in the church are not blessed in the context of Mass. At home or at church, the blessing may be celebrated during Liturgy of the Hours or a liturgy of the Word.

Blessing of Family: BB, chapter 1—The Feast is an appropriate time to recognize the sacredness of the family and ask for God’s special blessing upon them. BB chapter 1 (nos. 62-67) would be most useful for this.

Blessing of Homes During the Christmas Season: BB, chapter 50; HB, pg. 88—Epiphany is a traditional time when homes are blessed. One could also easily incorporate the Epiphany custom of marking the doors of the home with the year and the initials of the Magi (which is also an abbreviation for “May Christ bless this house” in Latin): 20+C+B+M+21. Texts for these blessings are also available online from the [USCCB](http://USCCB.org).

Upcoming Holy Days of Obligation and Movable Feasts During the Christmas Season

December 25—Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)—Under normal circumstances it would **always** a holy day of obligation! Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord!

December 27—The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph—This Feast is typically celebrated on the Sunday within the Octave of Christmas. This would be a great day to bless the families of your community (see the “*Book of Blessings* in the Christmas Season” below).

January 1—Octave Day of the Nativity of the Lord: Mary, the Holy Mother of God—Since it is a Friday, it would be a holy day of obligation under normal circumstances in 2021. This is our diocesan feast day, as well, with the diocese under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title “Mother of God.” Pray for the well-being of our diocese!

January 3—The Epiphany of the Lord—In the United States Epiphany is moved to the Sunday between January 2 and January 8, which in 2021 is January 3. **Please note**—in the *Roman Missal*, there are proper prayers to be used for Vigil Masses of Epiphany celebrated the evening of Saturday, January 2. The readings, however, remain the same for both days. There is also the tradition of announcing the dates Easter and the movable feasts for the year on Epiphany. The Missal (both English and Spanish) provide the text and music for this proclamation in the appendix. It is done after the Gospel by the deacon or by a cantor.

January 10—The Baptism of the Lord—This Feast is typically celebrated the Sunday after Epiphany, which in 2021 is January 10. As with any proper Feast, and since it is a Sunday, the *Gloria* is to be sung at this Mass. The Christmas season officially ends with the Baptism of the Lord. Fun fact: there is no First Sunday in Ordinary Time. Ordinary Time begins the Monday after the Baptism of the Lord.

Readings for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

Just a reminder—per the *Lectionary for Mass*, the readings for the proper Vigil Mass of the Nativity (#13 in the *Lectionary*) may be used for the Masses of Christmas Day, and, in fact, the readings from any of the Christmas Masses (#s 14-16) may be used at the other Christmas Masses depending on pastoral need. The preference would still seem to be to use the assigned readings at their assigned Masses since there is some continuity in their order (especially Mass at Midnight and Mass at Dawn), but they may be rearranged if it is pastorally helpful.

Christ is born: may no one hesitate to be reborn! He was generated, but not be regenerated... This is how his mercy was infused in our hearts. The Virgin became gravid with the Incarnation of the Son: may our hearts be gravid with faith in Christ! The Virgin gave birth to the Savior: may our souls give birth to salvation and may we give birth to praise! Let us not remain barren: may our souls be fertile for God!
—Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Discourses*, 189, 3

Christmas and the Creed

This piece has been in the newsletter before, but the words are still applicable to us today

Every time we proclaim the Creed at Mass, the Church asks us for a sign of reverence (a profound bow) at the words that speak of Christ's Incarnation and birth. However, on Christmas (and also the Solemnity of the Annunciation), we are instead asked to genuflect or kneel at those words. Since this is one of those points that only comes up twice a year, it may be worth reflecting on why we make a sign of reverence during the Creed at all, and then asking reflecting on why we are asked for more on those feasts.

Some sign of reverence has been a part of the Creed since at least the 1200s. Prior to the reforms of Vatican II, the faithful were asked to genuflect, but this was subsequently changed to a bow (except for Christmas and the Annunciation). Even though this rubric continued to appear in the Missal, its practice was seen to be sporadic, at best. It seems to have gotten its "second wind" with the publication of the revised Missal in 2011.

What makes this particular gesture important? We should look at it the way we look at the other postures and gestures at Mass — as an outward reflection of our interior disposition. In this case, we look at the words we have been praying in the Creed prior to and in connection with this sign of reverence. Up to this point, we have professed a faith in these things:

- ✦ A God who has made everything (“...maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible...”)
- ✦ “One Lord Jesus Christ” who not only stands as the only Son of God (who made everything as mentioned above) but is also “of the same substance” (consubstantial) with God, meaning he is divine as God is divine,
- ✦ This divine person comes into the world in the flesh (incarnate) and is born of a woman.

It is no wonder the angels sang their song of *Gloria* before the shepherds that first Christmas night! If we truly do believe the words we have been professing, the thought of this person, divine and human, being conceived and born into the world ought to elicit some sort of response from us. We enact that liturgically by bowing at those words on most Sundays and Solemnities, and then by genuflecting on those days in which we remember in a special way the Incarnation and birth of our Savior. We, in turn, can live that out in our lives by keeping before us the Incarnational nature of our Church and that this encounter with divinity continues to be mediated in a very fleshy way through us and all that God has made.

So, let us take those words we profess to heart, and let the liturgy continue to form us and train us in how we are to live.