



# Eastern Catholic Churches

## Comparisons with the Roman Catholic Church

### The Roman Catholic Church

#### Cultural Background of Believers

##### Origin and history of Roman Catholics in Australia

It was largely the Irish who brought the Roman Catholic faith to Australia at the time of white settlement and, for about one hundred and fifty years, the Church remained strongly Irish. Following the Second World War, European immigration began to change the face of the Roman Catholic Church in Australia. From this time the multiculturalism in the Church continued to grow. The Roman Catholic Church in Australia is now truly 'catholic' (universal), comprising of members from every continent in the world.

#### The language used in the Liturgy

Until the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, the language used in the liturgy of the Roman Rite was Latin. Following that Council, the liturgy began to be celebrated in English. Some parish communities also began to provide Masses in other languages such as Italian or Polish. It is not unusual now to find Mass celebrated in Vietnamese, Sudanese, Filipino or Indonesian. English, of course, remains the dominant language of the Roman liturgy here in Australia.

#### Liturgical Seasons

##### Advent/Christmas

The Season of Advent begins the liturgical year and is celebrated over four weeks leading to Christmas. It is a season of preparation for the 'coming' or advent of Christ – past, present and future – into the world. The season is characterised by the colour violet, which symbolises the darkness of the world before the coming of Christ, who is the light of the world.

Christmas is the feast of light. It is the celebration of the light-bearing Word of God born in human flesh. The colour of Christmas is white because it is the season of celebrating the pure light of Christ. The Christmas Season is celebrated over twelve days.



## Lent/Easter

The whole of the Lent/Easter season is a 90-day journey. The forty-day Season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and concludes on Holy Thursday evening with the Celebration of the Mass of the Lord's Supper.

Lent is primarily the Church's time of preparation for Easter – the Season of Baptism. Lent is the penitential season of the Church – the time for purifying our lives by prayer, fasting and almsgiving. The colour of Lent is violet, the colour associated with humility. In the early Church it was the period when candidates for Christian Initiation fasted and prayed more intensely before their baptism at the Easter Vigil.

Easter continues the journey with a 50-day celebration of Christ's resurrection. Easter is truly the highest point of the whole liturgical year. It is the celebration of life triumphing over death and of light triumphing over darkness. The colour of the season is white signifying the pure new life given us by Christ, particularly in Baptism.

## Ordinary Time

In the Roman Rite, the major part of the liturgical year is Ordinary Time. The word 'ordinary' is related to 'ordered' or 'counted' time. Each of the Sundays in Ordinary Time is counted, from 1 to 33. The colour of the season is green, symbolising growth. It is a quiet season for listening to the word of God and allowing it to grow in the 'soil' of the heart. It is the Church's belief that, by listening and responding to the gospels of Ordinary Time, we will grow in all ways into Christ.

## Significant Feast Days

The following are some of the significant days for Roman Catholics:

- Christmas day
- Mary, Mother of God
- Epiphany
- Baptism of the Lord
- Presentation of the Lord
- St Patrick
- St Joseph
- The Annunciation
- Easter Sunday
- Ascension
- Pentecost
- Trinity
- Body and Blood of Christ



- Saints Peter and Paul
- Birth of John the Baptist
- Sacred Heart
- Mary of the Cross MacKillop
- Assumption
- Immaculate Conception

## Reception of Sacraments

### Sacraments of Initiation

#### **Baptism**

Most candidates for baptism in the Roman Rite are infants. Baptism for infants is celebrated separately from Confirmation and Eucharist. If the candidate is an adult, he or she participates in a period of instruction and formation in faith known as the catechumenate. When an adult is baptised, he or she receives all the Sacraments of Initiation at the one time – Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

#### **Confirmation**

Confirmation, although closely linked to the Sacrament of Baptism, is generally celebrated in late childhood (around age 12) some years after the child has received First Communion. While Confirmation is often spoken of in relation to the Holy Spirit it is important to realise that the Holy Spirit is alive and active in all the sacraments. The Holy Spirit is called upon the waters of Baptism, the oil (Chrism) of Confirmation and the bread and wine of the Eucharist but each of the sacraments of initiation have their unique emphasis. In Confirmation the candidate is sealed with the Holy Spirit and strengthened to be a witness to Christ.

#### **Eucharist**

Until the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church continued the practice of giving First Communion to infants at their Baptism. At this time a change in emphasis led to people attending Mass and not receiving Communion due to a sense of unworthiness. The practice of giving Communion to infants also ceased. The Council of Trent (1545–63) decreed that children would receive First Communion when they reached the age of reason (around the age of 7). Children are now prepared for their First Communion at around the age of 8 or 9. Since the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, Roman Catholics have understood the Eucharist as the source and summit of Roman Catholic life. The whole of life is directed toward it and flows from it.

### Sacraments of Healing

#### **Penance**

Before receiving First Communion, children prepare to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance, better known as Reconciliation. The Church's Rite of Penance focuses on God's merciful love for us. The Rite of Penance is part of the Church's liturgy – the public worship of the Church. The Sacrament is best celebrated within a gathered community, accompanied by Scripture readings and prayers. In this



context people come forward for individual confession and absolution.

### **Anointing of the Sick**

Anointing of the sick is closely related to pastoral care within the parish. It is administered not only to the dying but also to those with less serious illnesses. The sick person is anointed with the oil of the sick and given Holy Communion. The focus of the sacrament is strengthening and healing.

## **Sacraments of Commitment**

### **Marriage**

For a Roman Catholic marriage to be valid it must take place before a priest and two witnesses. The bride and groom actually administer the sacrament to one another as they pronounce their marriage vows.

### **Holy Orders**

There are three Holy Orders in the Roman Catholic Church: deacon, priest and bishop.

- The *deacon* is ordained to serve the Church. He assists the bishop or the priest in the celebration of the Eucharist. He can also preside at the Sacraments of Baptism and Marriage.
- The *priest* is ordained to preach the word and preside over the liturgy and the celebration of the Sacraments. His role is also to care for the pastoral needs of his parish community.
- The *bishop* is a priest especially ordained to lead a diocese. His role is to teach and care for the spiritual needs of the priests and people of his diocese.

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