



The “Vanilla” Season of Ordinary Time

BY FR. LARRY RICE

One of the characteristics of Catholicism—indeed, of any liturgically-oriented church—is that the pattern of our worship follows a cycle of feasts and seasons. And so too, to some extent, does the secular world. Of course, those seasons don’t always align. When the rest of the world is in Christmas, we’re still in Advent. When we’re in the Christmas season, the rest of the world has packed away the Christmas decorations and is off to the January White Sales.

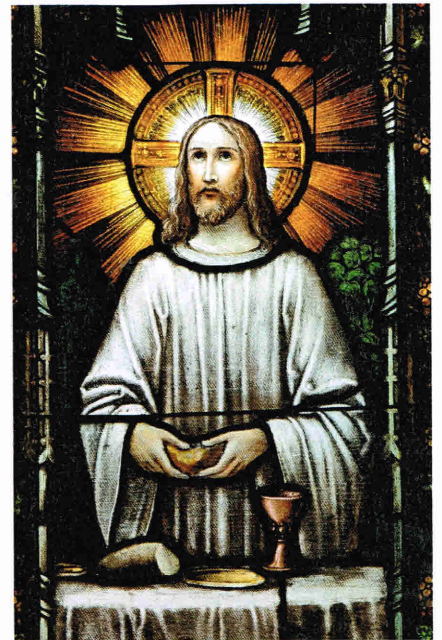
Our seasons run like this: Advent, which starts right after Thanksgiving. Christmas, which begins on Christmas Eve. A brief period of Ordinary Time, followed by Lent, Triduum, the Easter Season, and then a long stretch of Ordinary Time.

What, precisely is Ordinary Time? We usually define it by what it’s not. It’s the season when there’s no other season going on. If seasons were flavors, Ordinary Time would be vanilla. Of course, as any good cook will tell you, vanilla has its own, often underrated flavor, with its own nuances and characteristics.

To my way of thinking, Ordinary Time is the most challenging season. During Advent, there’s lots to do to prepare for Christmas. During Christmas, it’s simply expected that people will be full of good cheer, promoting charity and peace on Earth. Lent has its own set of internal to-dos: the prayer, fasting, almsgiving and repentance that prepare us for the Celebration of Easter. And, of course, The Triduum and Easter are the high-points of the entire year, with lots of preparation and celebration. In all these seasons, parishes have programs, prayers, and activities to guide us through them.

Ordinary Time, generally speaking, leaves us to our own routines, and our own discipline. It’s the time when we have to work to integrate our spirituality with the every-day: work, school, vacation, the ebb and flow of our lives. Fortunately, we have help and assistance with that task of integration. We have something that provides the support and spiritual nourishment we need to get through the every-day. That support is called Sunday.

Sundays, especially during this vanilla season, should be part of



Christ's supper at Emmaus is depicted in stained-glass window at the Basilica Church of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in Southampton, N.Y.

the rhythm of life that keeps our spirituality rooted in real life. If your life feels a little out of synch, driven by external events rather than by your own priorities, maybe you should re-examine how you’re keeping the Sabbath.

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