

Holy Days Observed in the English Church

by J.H. Newman

The sermon discusses the holy days observed in the English Church, including festivals and fasts, and their significance in the Christian calendar.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 27:26, Luke 18:13, Acts 13:3, 1 Corinthians 11:26, Hebrews 12:2

Topics: "Church Calendar", "Christian Fasting"

Description

J.H. Newman preaches about the Holy days observed by the Church of England, categorizing them into Festivals, days of joy, and fasts, days of sorrow. The Festivals include significant events like the Nativity of our Lord, Easter Day, Ascension Day, and Trinity Sunday, each commemorating crucial aspects of Christ's life and victory over darkness. The sermon also highlights the importance of fasting before certain festivals to prepare our hearts for the joyful celebrations and to remember the struggles and sufferings of the saints and apostles. Additionally, the sermon emphasizes the significance of Ember Days and the practice of fasting on Fridays throughout the year to reflect on Christ's sacrifice and love for us.

Transcript

The Holy days observed by the Church of England are of two kinds:--Festivals, or days of joy: and fasts, or days of sorrow.

The FESTIVALS are:--

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD, commonly called Christmas-day; on which we celebrate that great event, the birth, as man, of the everlasting and Almighty Son of God. (Dec. 25.)

THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST. On this day we are taught to remember with joy the transaction which may be called the first act of our LORD'S obedience to the law for our sakes; the beginning of that unspotted career of purity and duty, which He mercifully submitted to accomplish for the redemption of sinful man. (Jan. 1.)

THE EPIPHANY, the manifestation, or making known of the new-born SAVIOUR to the Gentiles. The first individuals, from the nations who till then had walked in darkness, who bent the knee before Him, were the Wise Men of the East; when led by a miraculous star, they brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh, as their offerings to Bethlehem. And this event we, in an island which has since, by GOD'S mercy, also caught the bright rays of Christian truth, cannot too joyfully or too thankfully commemorate. (Jan. 6.)

THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST in the temple, commonly called, the PURIFICATION of St. Mary the Virgin. The event commemorated on this day is the fulfilment of prophecy (Malachi iii. 1.) by our LORD'S appearance in the Temple, whither He was brought that His mother might comply with the rite of purification, enjoined by Moses. The examples of the holy Simeon and Anna (Luke ii.) are on this occasion held up for our imitation. Like them we should devoutly rejoice that our earthly career has been blessed by the knowledge of CHRIST'S coming in the flesh;--that we have been enabled to see that light which was destined to lighten the Gentiles, as well as to be the glory of GOD'S people Israel. (Feb. 2.)

THE ANNUNCIATION, or announcement of the approaching birth of the SAVIOUR by the angel Gabriel, to the Virgin Mary, Luke i. 26. (March 25.)

EASTER DAY, and the days following. On this greatest of all festivals, we celebrate the consummation of our LORD'S victory over the powers of darkness. His glorious and triumphant rising from the grave; an event in which His true followers rejoice as being alike the great confirmation of their Master's truth, and the earnest and proof of their own blissful resurrection in the fulness of GOD'S appointed time.

Easter is kept on different days of the months of March or April, in different years, the time of its celebration depending on that of a full moon, as did the Jewish Passover.

ASCENSION DAY, (forty days after Easter,) on which, as the name of the festival implies, we commemorate the ascension of our LORD into heaven, forty days after His resurrection.

WHITSUNDAY, or the Feast of Pentecost, (ten days after Ascension day.) On this day we celebrate the fulfilment of our LORD'S parting promise in the descent of the HOLY GHOST, in fire, upon His Apostles, to abide with them, and with His Holy Church, even unto the end of the world.

TRINITY SUNDAY, (the Sunday following Whitsunday.) On this day, having commemorated severally the different leading events in our LORD'S history, from the annunciation of His birth to the pouring forth of His Spirit, we are led by our Church to contemplate the mystery of our redemption in one general view; glorifying alike GOD the Father, who sent His dearly-beloved Son to save us; GOD the SON, who graciously undertook our redemption; and GOD the HOLY GHOST, who mercifully vouchsafes to sanctify us, and all the elect people of GOD.

THE CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.....Jan. 25.

ST. MATTHIASFeb. 24.

ST. MARKApr. 25.

ST. PHILIP AND ST. JAMESMay 1.

ST. BARNABASJune 11.

ST. JOHN THE BAPTISTJune 24.

ST. PETERJune 29.

ST. JAMESJuly 25.

ST. BARTHOLOMEWAug. 24.

ST. MATTHEWSept. 21.
 ST. LUKEOct. 18.
 ST. SIMON AND ST. JUDE.....Oct. 28.
 ST. ANDREWNov. 30.
 ST. THOMASDec. 21.
 ST. STEPHENDec. 26.
 ST. JOHNDec. 27.

On these days we are instructed to seek encouragement in our Christian warfare, by remembering, the triumphant issue of that warfare in the cases of those eminent followers of their LORD, the Apostles, the Evangelists, the Baptist, and the first martyr. In the graces bestowed upon them, we behold the most striking illustrations of GOD'S merciful promises of support to His servants; and in striving to confirm our own faith by the example of theirs, we are following the advice of one of themselves--of one "not a whit behind the chiefest of them,"--St. Paul. See his Epistle to the Hebrews, chap. xi.

THE HOLY INNOCENTS. On this day we commemorate the infants of Bethlehem, whose blood, shed by Herod, was the first spilt by the enemies of Christianity in opposition to its progress. Mourning this, and all similar events, the Church yet directs our praises to Him, who made infants to glorify Him by their deaths; and who, while receiving to His mercy these and millions of other infant souls, has declared for the instruction of those more advanced in years, that "of such" as little children "is the kingdom of heaven." (Dec. 28.)

ST. MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS. Sept. 29.

ALL SAINTS. Nov. 1.

We should ever recollect that we, humblest members of CHRIST'S Church militant here on earth, form part and portion of a great society--of what St. Paul calls "the general assembly and church of the first-born," Heb. xii. 23. And to this belong alike those glorious spirits who have never known either sin or sorrow, and those glorified saints, who, having come out of the great tribulations of earth, have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, Rev. vii. 14. These two days are there fore set apart, that we may comfort ourselves, by thinking on the great privilege to which we are invited, of an union with that blessed society; and that the thought may inspire us with additional ardour to run, while yet on earth, the race that is set before us.

The FASTS of the Church of England are,--

In the first place, the vigils, or days before the following festivals.

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

THE PURIFICATION

THE ANNUNCIATION

EASTER DAY

ASCENSION DAY

WHITSUNDAY

ST. MATTHIAS

ST. JOHN BAPTIST

ST. PETER

ST. JAMES

ST. BARTHOLOMEW

ST. MATTHIAS

ST. SIMON AND St. JUDE

ST. ANDREW

ST. THOMAS

ALL SAINTS.

These the Church has prescribed to be observed as seasons of fasting, that we may bring our minds into a fitter state for celebrating the more joyful solemnities which succeed them. Those festivals which are not preceded by such fasts either follow immediately after festivals, or occur, for the most part, in what the Church considers seasons of joy; as, for instance, the Circumcision, at Christmas time, and St. Mark's day, between Easter and Whitsuntide, while we are commemorating the glorious events which followed the resurrection. With regard to the feasts of Saints and Apostles, the observation of these fasts tends to revive in our minds the recollection of the troubles and sufferings which these Christian heroes underwent on their way to the possession of that happiness and glory which we are, on their festivals invited to contemplate. And upon this principle, probably, it is, that no fast is appointed before the feast of St. Michael and all Angels. We have no previous struggles with sin or evil to commemorate in the history of those exalted beings who have never partaken of mortality or of its troubles; but have from the beginning, been happy, pure, and holy, in Heaven.

LENT,--Or the season of forty days, excluding Sundays, which precedes Easter. The earlier part of this solemn season is intended to prepare us for the great week of our LORD'S passion, with which it concludes. And the space of forty days seems marked out as a proper period for fasting and humiliation by the instances, not only of Moses and Elias, but of One far greater than they, who prepared Himself for the commencement of His ministry by a fast of forty days in the wilderness.

ASH-WEDNESDAY.--The first day of those forty has ever been observed by the Church with peculiar solemnity. On that day, in early times, her ministers maintained the custom, which the Apostles had introduced and enjoined, of putting to open penance and shame notorious offenders against her laws or her authority; thus, according to the direction of Scripture, punishing them in this world, that they might be led to repentance, and that their souls might consequently be saved in the world which is to come.

But those happier, because purer, days of the Church's history have past away. GOD in His own good time will renew them; and that He will speedily do so, we are bound to pray. In the meanwhile, the Church calls upon us, upon this day, collectively to humble ourselves before Him whom our sins and our abandonment of this godly discipline have deeply offended; and to implore His pardon for those transgressions, committed among us, without meeting such rebuke, for which we affirm with our own mouths, His vengeance and curse to be due. In making this acknowledgment, we continue, in the Christian Church, a ceremony which GOD Himself ordained for the Jews. See Deut. xxvii 13--26.

The different days of Passion week: of the week, that is, between the Sunday before Easter and Easter-day are considered by the Church fasts of such importance as to have Epistles and Gospels appointed to each. The same reasons which should incline us to a reverential observance of Lent in general, apply of course, still more strongly to the week which represents the season of our SAVIOUR'S sufferings; and, most strongly of all, to that solemn day which commemorates His death; and which, in memory of the benefits which we derive from that mysterious event, we call Good Friday.

That we may, indeed, keep in continual remembrance the exceeding love of our Master and only SAVIOUR, thus dying for us, the Church reckons among her other fasts,

All FRIDAYS in the year, excepting, of course, Christmas-day, should that festival fall on a Friday.

The following days in the year are called EMBER-DAYS.

The Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday after

The first Sunday in Lent.

The Feast of Pentecost.

Sept. 14.

Dec. 13.

These days are ordained to be kept as fasts, because the four Sundays which respectively follow them are the appointed seasons for the ordination by our Bishops of priests and deacons to their sacred offices. St. Paul clearly declares the duty of all Christians to pray for those set in ministerial authority over them. And that fasting was practised by the early Church at the season when such ministers were ordained, we learn from Acts xiii. 3.

The above, with the three days immediately before Ascension day,--days which, under the name of Rogation days, the Church has from the very earliest times employed in special supplication and prayer,--complete the number of the fasts of our English Calendar.

A holy season which, though it is observed by some branches of the Church as a strict fast, is not comprised among the fasts of the Church of England, is that of ADVENT; the season of preparation for celebrating the festival of the Nativity. It begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas, and continues till Christmas Eve.

OXFORD,

The Feast of the Annunciation

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jh-newman/holy-days-observed-in-the-english-church/>

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