

“HOLY DAYS VS. HOLIDAYS”

MAINTAINING OUR CHRISTMAS JOY

Q: “Father, is New Year’s Day a holy day or just a holiday this year?” A: “Yes!” Despite the seemingly cryptic answer, in fact it is both each year. But it is not a holyday of obligation as the national holiday is observed on Monday. Yes, I am splitting hairs, but it is in order to make a point. If you have persistent questions about “holy days of obligation,” you are not alone, I assure you! More on that later. By law, the U.S. Congress has established eleven permanent **Federal Holidays**, some of which are observed solely with respect to government employees. Can you name them? (see below*) For example, mail delivery is suspended on Columbus Day, yet most every American goes to work or school on that Federal holiday. The first four congressionally designated federal holidays were New Year’s Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day. Approved on June 28, 1870, they were applicable only to federal employees in the District of Columbia. Soon, Congress extended holiday coverage to federal employees outside of Washington.

Attempts by secularists to remove Christmas as a Federal holiday abound, but to date, they have gained little traction. However, myriad battles rage in the courts over manger scenes, Christmas trees and even the name given to public school vacation periods (i.e. Winter Break). Most school districts have long since moved away from any mention of Christmas. A generation ago, no one would have batted an eye at a manger scene atop a department store. However, that has all changed in today’s hyper-sensitive climate. Regardless, as of now, Christmas remains both a holy day **and** a holiday. The Church’s **Code of Canon Law** (paragraph # 1246) lists ten Holy Days on her books, in addition to all fifty-two Sundays. Go ahead, try to list them! Good luck! The Code also notes that a national episcopal conference can reduce the number of holy days of obligation or transfer them to Sunday with the approval of the Holy Father. That has happened here.

In most dioceses in the USA, the observance of the Solemnity of Ascension has been transferred to the nearest Sunday, though not in the provinces of Boston, Hartford, New York, Newark, Omaha, and Philadelphia. As a result, we in this Archdiocese no longer celebrate the liturgy for the 7th Sunday of Easter— it has been replaced with the Ascension. Since that feast is so clearly linked to the 40th day after Easter, this change has been particularly irksome for me. These decisions are way above my paygrade, but if anyone asked me, I’d vote for going back to **Ascension Thursday!** Some of these regional differences have caused confusion, and we would all be better off to be on the same page on these matters. In a few cases (e.g. Sts. Peter and Paul) the precept of obligation to attend Mass has been removed altogether. Most Catholics in this country would be surprised to learn that the Solemnity of Saint Joseph is both a holy day and a holiday in Italy.

Here in the United States, generally speaking if a holyday (with the exception of **Christmas and Immaculate Conception**) falls on a Saturday or Monday, the “obligation” precept is removed, due to the multiplication of Masses two days in a row. The obligation is **never removed** from Christmas, regardless of the day of the week on which it falls. Nor is it removed for Immaculate Conception (December 8), largely because that solemnity links us to our official patroness of these United States, as decreed in 1847 A.D. by our country’s Catholic bishops. Why the confusing rules and differences among nations, you ask? It is a valid question.

In short, each nation has its own unique customs. We exchange gifts on Christmas; in Italy it is on Epiphany, always observed on January 6, regardless of the day of the week. It is a national holiday in Italy, while just another workday here. Sadly, most Christmas trees are “history” by the time January 6 arrives. Neither bad nor good, but clearly different traditions. This difference is in large part due to the fact that as the world became more secular, holy days were no longer national holidays, and people were expected to work and go to school. When I insisted on holding classes on All Saint’s Day in my previous parish (it had a school), I received pushback. Part of my reasoning to that decision was that the students needed to learn to balance the obligations of their faith with their daily work schedules. In other words, not every holy day is a holiday from work or school.

This is neither the season nor the proper forum in which to lament the growing secularization in our nation. Rather, I’m delighted that you chose to celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family with us today. **I hope many of you will choose to return** Monday, fully aware that there is no obligation attached to this year’s Mass. But it

is a beautiful way in which to begin the New Year, asking for God's blessings and the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God. Our hearts are filled with joy because the very Cause of our Joy dwells amongst us in the most profound way during this season. May God continue to bless us and watch over our parish this Christmas and into the New Year.

*Federal Holidays: New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday, Washington's Birthday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas. The 11th is Inauguration Day, (January 20th once every four years.) When January 20th falls on a Sunday, Inauguration Day moves to January 21st, but the president still takes the Oath in private on January 20th. *Church Holy Days: Christmas (December 25th), Epiphany (January 6th), Ascension of the Lord, Corpus Christi, Mary Mother of God (January 1st), Immaculate Conception (December 8th), Assumption (August 15th), Saint Joseph (March 19th), the Apostles Saints Peter and Paul (June 29th), and All Saints (November 1st). See Code of Canon Law, # 1246*

- Two 500-year-old paintings by Italian Renaissance maestro **Raphael** were “re-discovered” during the restoration of the Vatican’s Hall of Constantine. No, they were not tucked in a closet, but amidst a fresco painted by other artists. Raphael’s initial work had been forgotten until restoration work uncovered two female figures painted in oil, while the rest of the room was painted using the fresco technique. Experts believe it was his last work before he died at age 37 in 1520.
- Remember the chilling undercover videos (some taken during leisurely lunches in chic restaurants with glasses of chardonnay) showing Planned Parenthood officials discussing the sale of aborted fetuses for use by researchers? Well, one such fetal tissue company settled a \$7.8 million lawsuit that alleged the illegal sale of cells from fetal brain tissue for up to \$1,100 per vial. **DaVinci Biosciences** must cease all operations within 60-120 days.
- Your financial support is critical to our Cathedral’s upkeep, and please know how deeply I appreciate your sacrificial giving as 2017 ends.
- Oh, the joys of commuting! A new survey by the Insurance Company **QuoteWizard** (never heard of 'em) ranks Minnesota as having the country’s **second-worst drivers**. The factors measured include accidents, speeding tickets, DUIs, citations and fatalities. Only California is worse! Besides ice and snow, they blamed “Minnesota Nice” for making us indecisive behind the wheel!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector