

Group B 7-12 years - Nov. 2014 Lessons

The Feasts of the Church

1. The Feasts of the Church – definition, importance, classification. Sunday – weekly day of rest for Christians.

The Feasts are the holy days during the ecclesiastical year when the Church commemorates certain saints or events from the history of our salvation, re-lives them and explains their meaning through meditation and prayer for the spiritual benefit of the faithful; On such days, the Church recommends putting aside the earthly cares and instead, enjoying the spiritual joy of these Feasts by participating in the Divine Liturgy.

By contrast, the civic/national/international holydays are observed through physical rest, the historic commemoration of such events, which leads to the consolidation of the community's unity, identity, secular entertainment, etc.

Classification:

- According to the event/person celebrated:

Royal Feasts in honour of the Holy Trinity

in honour of the Theotokos.

in honour of the Holy Angels and the Holy Cross.

in honour of the Saints.

- According to date:

Feasts with a fixed date: *some Royal Feasts, in honour of the Theotokos, Holy Angels and Holy Cross, the Saints and Sunday as the weekly day of rest for Christians.*

- Feasts with movable dates – Royal Feasts during the Pascal season.

Sunday, the weekly day of rest for Christians.

“Remember the day of the Lord and honour it” (Ten Commandments, 4).

*Sunday is the first day of the week, which was always dedicated by Christians to the Lord, hence, the name of “**the day of the Lord.**”*

Arguments: *Sunday reminds us of the first day of the cycle of creation, when God created the world; it was also Sunday when Jesus Christ, the Son of God rose from the dead; and, again, on Sunday, fifty days after the Lord's Resurrection, the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles and established the Church. Consequently, Sunday is the day when we celebrate the three persons of the Holy Trinity: God the Father created the world, the Son saved the world and God the Holy Spirit descended within us/the Church to sanctify, protect and unite us with Christ for eternity.*



Sunday is not just a day of rest, such as the Sabbath in the Jewish tradition, but a day of worshipping God through our participation in the Divine Liturgy, acts of mercy towards our neighbours and any other good deed in compliance with His commandments. The highest form of honouring Sunday is by partaking of the Lord's Body and Blood during the Divine Liturgy.

Sunday is the first and oldest holy day of Christianity. Jesus Himself appeared to the disciples after His resurrection and gave them the bread (the supper with Lukas and Cleopas); the first Christians used to gather and do the same. In the fourth century, during the reign of Constantine the Great, Sunday became the official day of rest throughout the Empire.

“When you gather on the Day of the Lord, having confessed your sins, breake bread and give thanks in order that your sacrifice be pure” (The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles/Didache).

*In the first centuries, Christians paid a great deal of attention to the way they honoured Sunday, hence the canon/rule of the Church to **excommunicate** those who missed the Divine Liturgy three Sundays in a row without a good reason (sickness) and the clergy to be defrocked.*

Our preparation to honour Sunday should consist of: confession if we want to receive the Holy Communion, prayers, proper personal hygiene and attire, preparation of the gifts we bring to the Altar, reconciliation with our neighbours.

We partake in this holy day by: active participation in the Divine Liturgy, singing, communion, fellowship, acts of mercy, reading from the Scripture, rest (from work for our own gains).

“Christians who work on Sunday for a fleeting gain, lose much more, lose everything, even their souls. The Lord's Day is a day of rest and of the soul's illumination. Sunday is the day which gives light, warmth and blessing to the other days of the week. It is worth knowing that he who works on Sundays and Feast days places his wealth and soul in jeopardy. Whatever deal Christians make on a holy day is subject to curse. The money made on Sunday is spent foolishly and, just like the smoke, it dissipates in turbulent windstorms” (St. John Chrysostom).

2. Royal Feast days

These are the Feasts honouring the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, reminding us about God's work for our salvation. If one cannot read the Holy Scripture to find out what God has done for us, one might have a better understanding by participating in the Royal Feasts of the Church throughout the course of a year.

According to their date of observing, the royal Feasts form two categories:

1. ***With fixed date: the Lord's Nativity/Christmas (Dec. 25), Circumcision (Jan. 1), Epiphany (Jan 6), the Meeting of the Lord (Feb. 2), the Transfiguration (Aug.***



6), *the Elevation of the Holy Cross* (Sept. 14).

2. **With movable date** – which change according to the date of Easter: **Palm Sunday** (one week before Easter), **the Lord's Resurrection** (Easter), **the Ascension** (on the 40th day after Easter), **the Pentecost** (50 days after Easter).

3. Feasts in honour of the Saints – our intercessors before God for us.

The Saints are the human beings/Christians who lived within the boundaries of God's commandments and, having used the armour of the Holy Spirit (acquired through the Sacraments) fought against the temptations and were cleansed, being sanctified to the point of uniting their heart and will with God. The saints love God and all of creation with the same kind of godly love. As lovers of God, they pray for the entire world, being thus our intercessors before God.

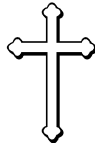
Since they are well-pleasing to God, He fulfills (as He promised) their requests. For this reason the Church teaches us to maintain our relationship with the Saints. When we venerate the saints, we praise God who has them in His favour and ask the Holy Spirit to abide within us as He did in them.

By faith, by receiving God's grace through the Holy Sacraments of the Church and by observing God's commandments any person/Christian can become a saint. After they fell asleep in the Lord, and in some cases even during their life, God gives indication that they have been sanctified: the right teaching of the faith, miracles, the intact preservation of their bodies, help for Christians who prayed to them. The saints belong to all social categories: clergy, laity, adults or children, highly educated or simple people, rich or poor. Some lived as hermits, others had families, some have been persecuted and even died for their faith as martyrs.

Based on these signs/indications, the Church declares somebody a saint, establishes a date of commemoration (the date of death) and includes their name in the Orthodox calendar. Because of the large number of saints, the Church lists only the most popular saints in the calendar.

The Divine Liturgy cannot be celebrated without an Antemension, which has the relic of a saint inserted into it.

The first Sunday after Pentecost is dedicated to all Saints.



4. Saint Andrew the Apostle (Nov. 30)

Saint Andrew was the first disciple of Jesus. He was the younger brother of Saint Peter and was born in Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee. The brothers were fishermen by trade. Jesus called them to be his disciples by saying that he would make them “fishers of men.”

The Gospel of John teaches us much about St. Andrew who was originally a disciple of St. John the Baptist. When John pointed to Jesus and said, “Behold the Lamb of God!” Andrew understood that Jesus was greater and immediately left John to follow Jesus. He visited in Jesus’ home and later brought his brother Simon Peter, who Jesus also called to be an apostle.

*It is believed that **Saint Andrew** and Saint Peter continued their trade as fishermen until Christ called them to a closer relationship, and they left all things to follow Jesus.*

*After Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, **St. Andrew the Apostle** preached the gospel in Asia Minor and in Scythia. Not much is mentioned in the Book of Acts regarding the life of Saint Andrew.*

Saint Andrew was martyred by crucifixion at Patras in Achaea in Greece. Because St. Andrew deemed himself unworthy to be crucified on the same type of cross on which Christ had been crucified, he asked to be tied to a Crux decussata or an X shaped cross. The Apostle Andrew did not die right away but instead he was left to suffer for two days while he continued to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ until he finally died.

*Although little is mentioned in the Book of Acts regarding **the life of St. Andrew**, much can be learned through St. Andrew's life. He and Saint Peter gave up their lifelong careers and lifestyles, leaving everything behind, to follow Jesus. Their undying faith in a difficult world is an inspiration to all Christians.*

His relics consist of a small finger, the top of his cranium and pieces of the cross. These are kept in a shrine at the Church of St. Andrew in Patras.