
DECEMBER EMBER DAYS

Sanctifying the seasons

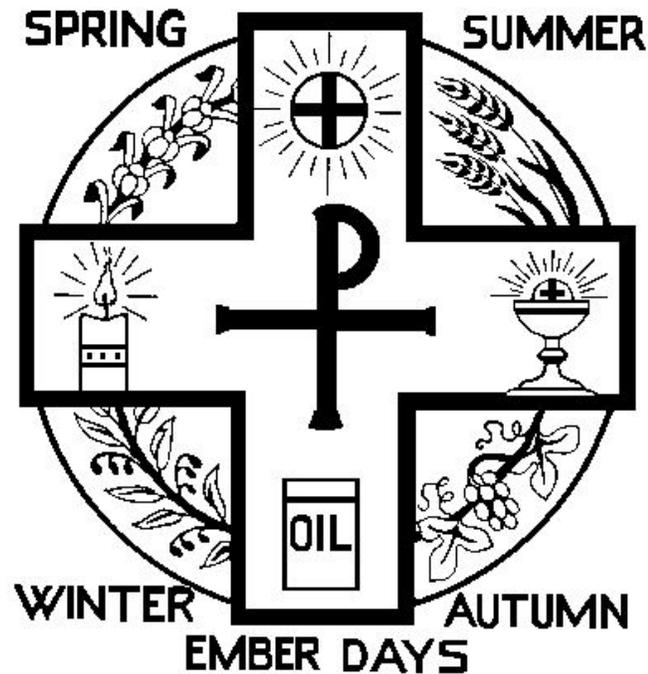


The Ember Days.

Four times a year, the Church sets aside three days to focus on God through His marvelous creation. These quarterly periods take place around the beginnings of the four natural seasons. The seasons are “like some virgins dancing in a circle, succeed one another with the happiest harmony,” as St. John Chrysostom wrote.

These four times are each kept on a successive Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday and are known as “Ember Days,” or *Quatuor Tempora*, in Latin. The first of these four times comes in Winter, after the the Feast of St. Lucy; the second comes in Spring, the week after Ash Wednesday; the third comes in Summer, after Pentecost Sunday; and the last comes in Autumn, after the Feast of the Holy Cross.

These times are spent fasting and partially abstaining (voluntary since the new Code of Canon Law) in penance and with the intentions of thanking God for the gifts He gives us in nature and beseeching Him for the discipline to use them in moderation. The fasts, known as “Jejunia quatuor temporum,” or “the fast of the four seasons,” are rooted in Old Testament practices of fasting four times a year:



Zacharias 8:19:

Thus saith the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Juda, joy, and gladness, and great solemnities: only love ye truth and peace.

The Ember days are true Catholic tradition actually dating back to the Apostles, (Pope Leo the Great claims it was instituted by the Apostles). Pope Callistus (217-222) in the “Liber Pontificalis” has laws ordering all to observe a fast three times a year to counteract the hedonistic and pagan Roman rites praying for:

1. a good harvest (June),
2. a good vintage (September),
3. a good seeding (December).

The Ember days this week represent one last voice crying out in the wilderness, to make straight the way of the Lord in our hearts before celebrating His first coming and looking toward His second. The readings for the December Ember Wednesday—Isaiah 2:2-5; Isaiah 7:10-15; Luke 1:26-38—prophesy the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles and call followers to walk in the light of

the Lord, and recount Isaiah's prophecy of the virgin who shall give birth to God among men, and then show the fulfillment of that prophecy in the Annunciation.

— Fr. Butler