



# INSTITUTE OF CHRIST THE KING SOVEREIGN PRIEST

## WHAT ARE THE EMBER DAYS?

Ember days (corruption from Lat. Quatuor Tempora, four times) are the days at the beginning of the seasons ordered by the Church as days of fast and abstinence. They were definitely arranged and prescribed for the entire Church by Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) for the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday after 13 December (S. Lucia), after Ash Wednesday, after Whitsunday, and after 14 September (Exaltation of the Cross).

The purpose of their introduction, besides the general one intended by all prayer and fasting, was to thank God for the gifts of nature, to teach men to make use of them in moderation, and to assist the needy. The immediate occasion was the practice of the heathens of Rome. The Romans were originally given to agriculture, and their native gods belonged to the same class. At the beginning of the time for seeding and harvesting religious ceremonies were performed to implore the help of their deities: in June for a bountiful harvest, in September for a rich vintage, and in December for the seeding; hence their *feriae sementivae*, *feriae messis*, and *feriae vindimiales*. The Church, when converting heathen nations, has always tried to sanctify any practices which could



*A diagram of the Ember Days in a manuscript made at Thorney Abbey, c. 1110, Oxford, St John's College MS. 17, f. 24v*

be utilized for a good purpose. At first the Church in Rome had fasts in June, September, and December; the exact days were not fixed but were announced by the priests. The "Liber Pontificalis" ascribes to Pope Callistus (217-222) a law ordering the fast, but probably it is older. Leo the Great (440-461) considers it an Apostolic institution. When the fourth season was added cannot be ascertained, but Gelasius (492-496) speaks of all four. This pope also permitted the conferring of priesthood and deaconship on the Saturdays of ember week - these were formerly given only at Easter. Before Gelasius the ember days were known only in Rome, but after his time their observance spread. They were brought into England by St. Augustine; into Gaul and Germany by the Carolingians. Spain adopted them with the Roman Liturgy in the eleventh century. They were introduced by St. Charles Borromeo into Milan. The Eastern Church does not know them.

The present Roman Missal, in the formulary for the Ember days, retains in part the old practice of lessons from Scripture in addition to the ordinary two: for the Wednesdays three, for the Saturdays six, and seven for the Saturday in December. Some of these lessons contain promises of a bountiful harvest for those that serve God.

*Source: Catholic Encyclopedia, New Advent*

## CONFESSION AND MENTAL HEALTH

"When speaking of the priest's contribution to mental health, one's thoughts turn first to his function as confessor. Now, confession in the Catholic sense has a therapeutic value all its own, but it cannot be compared with any other therapeutic device since confession is a sacrament and therefore belongs to the supernatural order. Those who look upon sacramental confession as just another psychotherapeutic device miss its meaning completely...although confession belongs to the supernatural order, it has psychotherapeutic after-effects, for it not only rids the penitent of his sins but greatly contributes in most cases to his feelings of security by ridding him of his feelings of guilt."<sup>1</sup>



*Ambrose Window, Shrewsbury Cathedral*

The above quote is a neat summary of what follows. In his excellent booklet *Confession: A Source Of Enduring Grace*, Father J de Mallmann writes about a doctor who tells a priest: "Sometimes I wonder whether instead of my white coat, I ought to don a cassock. ...I can give advice but no absolution."<sup>2</sup> Of course, the doctor is exaggerating. There are certainly those who need mental health specialists. But he does have a point: in the old days when psychiatrists had the time to listen for prolonged periods to their patients, it sometimes did feel like confession without absolution.

But confession cannot be reduced to psychology because it belongs to the supernatural order. In his booklet on confession, Father Hugh Thwaites<sup>3</sup> puts it so well: "The human soul has the capacity for God much as an electric light bulb has capacity for electricity, and when a man is baptised, the Holy Trinity enters his soul, and at once he starts living with a new life. Just as when you turn the light on the darkness goes, so when God enters the soul all sin goes, all sin is forgiven...He is incorporated into Christ, and he starts living a supernatural life, which is nothing more or less than a sharing in the life of Jesus." Father Thwaites goes on to say that we have been given not only baptism, but confession as well because we are chronic sinners in need of God's mercy. He notes the many fruits of the sacrament. It obtains for us a greater delicacy of conscience. We receive the "grace of a greater supernatural hatred for sin." And it gives us a greater awareness of God's love for us.

Father Mallmann observes that we often have a negative view of confession when we only think of it in terms of cleansing our souls. We forget that a sacrament is essentially a source of life: "If St Francis de Sales and St Vincent de Paul confessed daily, it is because they possessed an essentially positive view of the sacrament. For them, confession was like another form of Communion to which they sought fruitful recourse in order to be ever more alive." Confession is thus an encounter with the Lord. Father Mallmann discusses the fruits of confession according to

the teachings of Pope Pius XII. Firstly, it increases true self-knowledge. The more specific the confession, the more firm will be the resolution. Secondly, it encourages humility: “Since each of my failings spring, without a shadow of a doubt, from an upsurge of pride which prefers my will to the will of God, is it not natural that my pride be curtailed principally by the humiliation that comes with true confession of my sin?” Thirdly, confession lends itself to the uprooting of bad habits. Fourthly, we will combat spiritual negligence and lukewarmness: “My love for Jesus will be renewed, and having rediscovered the fear of sin, the Passion and the Cross will once more take on their true dimensions and I will be astonished by the bounty, patience and mercy of God.” Fifthly, confession purifies our conscience. The more we confess, the less likely are we to be deceived about the state of our souls. Sixthly, confession strengthens the will. Seventhly, it lends itself to spiritual direction. St Bernard said: “He who would be a teacher to himself is student to a fool!” Finally, confession increases grace. Father Thwaites notes three qualities of a good confession. First of all, exactness. We should distinguish between what is sinful and what is just an imperfection. We are there to confess our sins, not those of others. Secondly, tranquility : “Too much anxiety can diminish our confidence in God’s love for us, so we should have great peace in this sacrament.” The third quality is energy, and this refers to our purpose of amendment, in our desire to correct our faults.

I will end this reflection with these beautiful words of Father Thwaites: “In conclusion, we must try to have a great love of this sacrament. When Jesus came back from the dead, He could hardly wait to give (this sacrament) to us. He had hardly got into the upper room before He was saying: Receive the Holy Spirit, whose sins you forgive, they will be forgiven. That is what He came in to the world for, to forgive us our sins...” - **Pravin Thevathasan**

<sup>1</sup> J. H Vander Veldt and R Odenwald, Psychiatry and Catholicism (McGraw-Hill, 1952)

<sup>2</sup> J. de Mallmann Un Resourcement Permanent La Confession (H. BOSCO, 1988)

<sup>3</sup> Fr. Hugh Thwaites, S.J. Confession (Augustine Publishing Co, 1985)

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### ✦ **CANON GRIBBIN’S FAREWELL TO SHREWSBURY!**

Canon Gribbin will be here on September 26<sup>th</sup> to celebrate his farewell Mass at 12:30 pm before leaving for Ireland.



### ✦ **CHURCH CLEANING VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!**

We are looking for generous volunteers to join the team of helpers in the Parish who keep St. Winefride’s Church clean and adorned with flowers. If you are able to participate in the cleaning or flower arranging duties please let Canon Wiener know. Thank you.

## SHREWSBURY WEEKLY SCHEDULE

DAY	DATE	TIME	MASS OF THE DAY	INTENTIONS
Sun	19 <sup>th</sup> Sep	12:30 pm	Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost,	Birthday Thanksgiving
Mon	20 <sup>th</sup> Sep	10:00 am	St. Eustace & his companions, Martyrs	Julia Clow recovery
Tue	21 <sup>st</sup> Sep	6:30 pm	St. Matthew, Apostle & Evangelist	Sylvia Osborne RIP
Wed	22 <sup>nd</sup> Sep	10:00 am	Ember Day	John Sunderland RIP
Thu	23 <sup>rd</sup> Sep	6:30 pm	St. Linus, Pope & martyr	Sister Josephine recovery
Fri	24 <sup>th</sup> Sep	10:00 am	Ember Day	Joseph Francis Steuers
Sat	25 <sup>th</sup> Sep	10:00 am	Ember Day	Hugh Jordan RIP
Sun	26 <sup>th</sup> Sep	12:30 pm	Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost	PI

**All Masses (incl. Adoration and Benediction on Tuesday and Thursday) are at St. Winefride’s Church, 187 Crowmere Rd, Shrewsbury SY2 5LA.**

**Note that Adoration and Benediction on Tuesdays and Thursdays start at 5.30 pm before the 6.30 pm Mass.**

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