

Ember Days - Advent

• **St. Lucy Day** • **Ash Wednesday** •

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Seasonal Days of Penance for
Prayer • Thanksgiving
Fasting • Abstinence
• Prayers for Priests •

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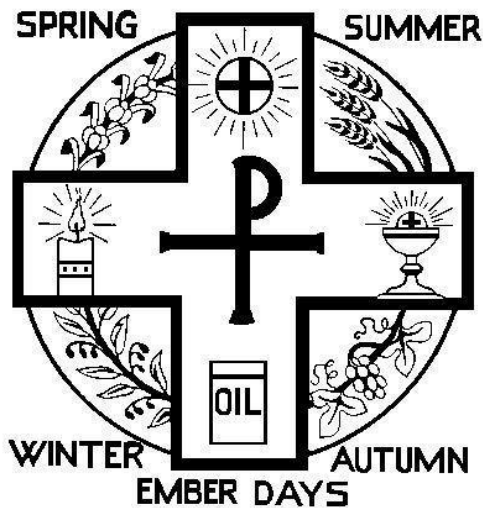
Ember Days

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Wednesday • Friday • Saturday
after the Feast
to Recall Judas' Betrayal
the Crucifixion • the Tomb

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• **Holy Cross** • *BarefootAbbey.com* • **Pentecost** •



From *With Christ Through the Year* by Rev. Bernard Strasser, O.S.B.,
Illustrated by Sister M.A. Justina Knapp, O.S.B.,
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Winter or Advent Ember Days are after the Feast of St. Lucy (December 13th) and give thanks for the olives that make holy oils for Unction.

Spring or Lenten Ember Days are after Ash Wednesday (moveable, February 4th-March 10th) and give thanks for the flowers and bees that make blessed candles as in for Baptism and upon the altar.

Summer or Whit Ember Days are after the Solemnity of Pentecost (50 days after Easter) and give thanks for the wheat used to make the Eucharist hosts.

Autumn or Michaelmas Ember Days are after the Feast of Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14) and give thanks for the grapes that make wine for the Precious Blood of Christ.

*What are EMBER DAYS?

We are trying a new thing this year, which are called EMBER DAYS. Below gives further explanation (an article I found), which explains Ember Days pretty well, and some reasons why it's good to observe them. But I think it never hurts to have some extra times of prayer for renewal! -Fr. Kevin

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Article from website "Catholic Culture"

<https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/blog/index.cfm?ID=155>

Four times a year, approximately three months apart, near the beginning of each season of the solar cycle (winter, spring, summer and autumn), the Church set aside three days (a total of twelve days in a year) to ask for blessings upon mankind, and to pray in gratitude for the blessings of nature, particularly those used by the Church in her Liturgy, such as olives, grapes, and wheat. This is also a time set apart to thank God for the sacraments and pray for priests, particularly those who were being ordained. These days are marked with prayer, fasting and abstinence and stress spiritual renewal; Ember Days could be regarded as quarterly spiritual check-ups.

Why are they called "Ember Days"?

The words has nothing to do with embers or ashes. It may be from the Anglo-Saxon *ymbren*, a circle or revolution; or it may be a corruption of *quatuor tempora*; for in Dutch the name is "Quatertemper," in German "Quatember," and in Danish "Kvatember"—whence the transition to Ember Days is easy (Sullivan, *The Externals of the Catholic Church*).

This is an ancient tradition of the Church. Pope St. Leo the Great in the 5th century mentioned the Ember Day Fasts, pointing to these fasts as stemming from Old Testament and Apostolic tradition. (See the [Fathers of the Church Collection](#), sermons on fasting by St. Leo).

While not universally practiced, Ember Days are still a vital part of the Church's tradition.

Timing of Ember Days

The traditional dates for the Ember days are the Wednesday, Friday and Saturday:

- 1. After St. Lucy's feast day, December 13**
- 2. After the First Sunday of Lent**
- 3. After Pentecost (Whitsunday) (this would be during the traditional octave of Pentecost)**
- 4. After the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, September 14**

These were days of fasting and abstinence, allowing one full meal, with meat at the principal meal only, except on Fridays where complete abstinence was required. The Code of Canon Law of 1983 no longer requires the observance of these fasting and abstinence rules for Ember Days.

Formerly, priestly ordinations were performed on many of the Saturday Ember Days. There is no longer this liturgical connection in the United States, but Ember Saturdays still are a day to pray for priests.

The Ember Days also are no longer universally marked on the General Roman Calendar. In the 1969 Calendar reform (see [General Instruction on the Roman Missal](#)), the observance of Ember Days was left to the discretion of the conference of bishops, and can be adjusted and expanded.

Ember Days Here and Now

With all the changes, it could be asked why bother with Ember Days? Are there other reasons to observe Ember Days? And what ways can we observe personally in our families?

I see several reasons why and how we can observe Ember Days:

1) In Thanksgiving for God's creation. First of all, the Ember Days can remind us that God speaks to us in His creation. In today's age of predominantly urban living with technology there can be a disconnect with God and creation.

Contemporary man is often cut off from nature; he lives in a world that is reduced to a universe of tarmac, concrete, and all kinds of screens. He is the prisoner of a fabricated world, a virtual world, the projection of his own fantasies, instead of being in contact with creation. As a result, he is sometimes cut off from God—and from himself (Jacques Philippe, *Thirsting for Prayer*, pp. 74-75).

Our food is shipped from all over the world, arriving in big box stores, wrapped in plastic and paper. We watch the weather forecast for our outdoor sports activities, not with an awareness of the nearby farmer's need for his crops. By observing in small ways the quarterly Ember Days with a focus on the different harvest seasons, we can bring our thoughts back to God and His creation, and also unite with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

One must point out that the public prayer of the church as contained in the missal, breviary and ritual is not for the exclusive welfare of the farmer, but for all the members of Christ's Body. The man or woman in the city cathedral praying the Mass or using the sacramentals is praying for the good of the farmer; and likewise the farmer in the little rural church at Mass or any public service of the liturgy as well as in the use of the sacramentals and ritual is mindful of his brother's needs before the throne of almighty God and in union with the eternal Priest, the Redeemer, our Lord Himself (Morrison, "Using Sacramentals", *Orate Fratres*, Volume XXIV, February 1950, No. 3, pp. 128-132).

Observing the Ember Days brings us closer to creation, and gratitude for "our daily bread." We are linking back to our agrarian roots to find God and to reconnect the urban and rural members in the Mystical Body of Christ.

2) A Mini-Lent: Bringing Our Focus Back to God. Putting aside some time for God through prayer and penance each quarter of the year can help redirect our focus back to God. We are often pulled in all directions by worldly needs. The Ember Days could be considered a mini-Lent (Msgr. Hellriegel provides some [meditations on the Fall Ember Days](#)). A little fasting and self-denial can help jump-start our spiritual lives.

The penance aspect is also brought forward by offering our first-fruits in a variety of ways. [Ade Bethune](#) tells of her canning experience during the War, pointing out that:

"...the idea remains that we must, of the abundance which is given us, offer the first fruits as a gift. No man can receive a gift worthily unless he makes himself like the one from whom he holds the gift. And how can we be like Him who gives us all? By giving, even as He gives."

3) A Family Program Brings Us Closer to God. We can look at Ember Days with a family focus.

Formerly Ember Days were dreaded because of the penance involved. I found a [wonderful article by Florence Berger](#) which helps put the Ember Days in a different, more positive light.

To most of us an ember day means penance and some extra prayers, and codfish balls for dinner. If I were to tell you an ember day is a feast day you would ask where I ever heard such a thing. If I would call it a day of joy when we should sing and play and have fun you would think me slightly "tetched." If finally I would suggest having guests or at least a good family dinner to celebrate the ember season of September you would say I was making rules to suit myself. Yet codfish and long faces are not at all necessary "to thank God for the gifts of nature, to teach men to make use of them in moderation and to assist the need." These three are the first purpose of ember days....But four times a year, in a very special way holy Church runs to God, her helper and her strength and says her thanks....Thankfulness is a happy expression of love and service and our ember days are days of thanksgiving for harvest and home....At the same time she is doing penance because she will give up some of her blessings "to draw near to God" and acknowledge His bounty.

She unveils her family's program for Ember Days:

1. focusing on thanksgiving to God;

2. giving to the poor,
3. illustrating one of the purposes of fasting, and praying for priests while planting the seed for the future vocations for her children.

4) For Priests and Vocations. Dare I add a fourth reason? Our current vocation crisis cannot be denied. And those who are priests and religious need prayers to be strong and faithful in serving the Lord. We need to pray for our priests, pray for religious and pray for vocations. Observing Ember Days is adding a few more feast days to our Liturgical celebrations, rounding out our prayers of petition, thanksgiving and penance. We do not have to make this complicated. The Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours is the focus of prayer in thanksgiving and petition. The Ordinary Form does not have specific Liturgy for Ember Days, but various [meditations](#) can help our intention. The penance aspect can be through voluntary fasting and abstinence, and also through almsgiving. We don't have to follow the traditional prescribed abstinence and fasting rules; days with added mortifications and perhaps abbreviated fasting or self-denial, but it's keeping the spirit of the Ember Days.

Advent Embertide

Article from:

<https://www.fisheaters.com/customsadvent11.html>

The Natural Season

Psalm 147:12, 16-17 "Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem: praise thy God, O Sion. Who giveth snow like wool: scattereth mists like ashes. He sendeth his crystal like morsels: who shall stand before the face of his cold?"

Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday after Gaudete Sunday (3rd Sunday of Advent) are known as "Advent Embertide," and they come near the beginning of the Season of Winter (December, January, February).

Winter is a time of reflection, when human activity is stilled and snow blankets the world with silence. For the Christian, Winter symbolizes Hope: though the world now appears lifeless and makes us think of our own mortality, we hope in our resurrection because of the Resurrection of the One Whose Nativity we await now. How providential that the Christ Child will be born at the beginning of this icy season, bringing with Him all the hope of Spring! Also among our Winter feasts are the Epiphany and Candlemas, two of the loveliest days of the year, the first evoked by water, incense, and gold; the latter by fire...

Yes, despite the typical, unimaginative view of Winter as a long bout with misery, the season is among the most beautiful and filled with charms. The ephemeral beauty of a single snowflake... the pale blue tint of sky reflected in snow that glitters, and gives way with a satisfying crunch under foot... skeletal trees entombed in crystal, white as bones, cold as death, creaking under the weight of their icy shrouds... the wonderful feeling of being inside, next to a fire, while the winds whirl outside... the smell of burning wood mingled with evergreen... warm hands embracing your wind-bitten ones... the brilliant colors of certain winter birds, so shocking against the ocean of white... the wonderfully long nights which lend themselves to a sense of intimacy and quiet! Go outside and look at the clear Winter skies ruled by Taurus, with the Pleiades on its shoulder and Orion nearby... Such beauty!

Even if you are not a "winter person," consider that Shakespeare had the right idea when he wrote in "Love's Labours Lost":

Why should proud summer boast
Before the birds have any cause to sing?
Why should I joy in an abortive birth?
At Christmas I no more desire a rose
Than wish a snow in May's new-fangled mirth;
But like of each thing that in season grows.

Associations and Symbols

Winter is characterized by "wet and cold," and is associated with the golden years of old age, ...the phlegmatic temperament, and the element of water. Giuseppe Arcimboldo's fascinating portraits of the season and its associated element lead the imagination in all directions:

Get your children to think of what changes atmospherically and astronomically during the this season. Why is it so cold? How does the cold affect the earth's air and waters? Remember that lore says that the weather conditions of each of the three days of an Embertide foretell the weather of the next three months, so the weather seen on Wednesday of Advent Embertide predicts the weather of the coming January, Friday's weather foretells the weather of February, and Saturday's weather foretells the weather of March. Make a note of the weather on those three days and see if the old tales are true!

What stars can be seen during the Winter months? Do your children know the traditional names for this season's full Moons?:



December	Cold Moon
January	Wolf Moon
February	Snow Moon

If they were in charge of naming the Moons of this season, what would they call them?

Ask your children to consider how the seasonal changes of Winter affect the plants and animals. How have the trees changed? What are the animals doing now? Which are hibernating? Which are gone, having migrated? What do the animals that aren't hibernating or gone eat now? Have any stored up food to eat during the cold months? Which have fur that has grown thicker to protect them? Do any have fur that has changed color to match the snow?

Ask them to consider how the seasonal changes affect (or traditionally affected) the activities of man. What can we do now that we couldn't do at other times of the year? What can't we do? How do modern conveniences affect the answers to those questions? Ask them how they would ensure they had shelter, food, and water if they were put into the middle of the woods right now, with the season as it is. What plants and animals would be available to eat? How would they keep themselves dry and warm and protected from the winds?

In addition to these things, now is the time to make snow angels, build snowmen and snowforts and ice sculptures, sled, ski, skate, ice fish, sit around hearths and tell tales, make crafts indoors, watch for and feed the Winter birds, and, most of all, praise God for His artistry and providence... Get to it!

-- and know that just when you tire of this season, Spring will be here!

From the Proslogion by Saint Anselm, bishop: *Make a little time for God / Desire for God*

(Cap.1: Opera Omnia, Edit. Schmitt, Secovii, 1938, 1, 97-100)

Insignificant man, escape from your everyday business for a short while, hide for a moment from your restless thoughts. Break off from your cares and troubles and be less concerned about your tasks and labors. Make a little time for God and rest a while in him.

Enter into your mind's inner chamber. Shut out everything but God and whatever helps you to seek him; and when you have shut the door, look for him. Speak now to God and say with your whole heart: *I seek your face; your face, Lord, I desire.*

Lord, my God, teach my heart where and how to seek you, where and how to find you. Lord, if you are not here where shall I look for you in your absence? Yet if you are everywhere, why do I not see you when you are present? But surely you dwell in "light inaccessible." And where is light inaccessible? How shall I approach light inaccessible? Or who will lead me and bring me into it that I may see you there? And then, by what signs and under what forms shall I seek you? I have never seen you, Lord my God; I do not know your face.

Lord most high, what shall this exile do, so far from you? What shall your servant do, tormented by love of you and cast so far from your face? He yearns to see you, and your face is too far from him. He desires to approach you, and your dwelling is unapproachable. He longs to find you, and does not know your dwelling place. He strives to look for you, and does not know your face.

Lord, you are my God and you are my Lord, and I have never seen you. You have made me and remade me, and you have given me all the good things I possess and still I do not know you. I was made in order to see you, and I have not yet done that for which I was made.

Lord, how long will it be? How long, Lord, will you forget us? How long will you turn your face away from us? When will you look upon us and hear us? When will you enlighten our eyes and show us your face? When will you give yourself back to us?

Look upon us, Lord, hear us and enlighten us, show us your very self. Restore yourself to us that it may go well with us whose life is so evil without you. Take pity on our efforts and our striving toward you, for we have no strength apart from you.

Teach me to seek you, and when I seek you show yourself to me, for I cannot seek you unless you teach me, nor can I find you unless you show yourself to me. Let me seek you in desiring you and desire you in seeking you, find you in loving you.

From a sermon by Saint Peter Chrysologus, bishop *Love desires to see God*

(Sermo 147: PL 52, 594-595)

In all the events we have recalled, the flame of divine love enkindled human hearts and its intoxication overflowed into men's senses. Wounded by love, they longed to look upon God with their bodily eyes. Yet how could our narrow human vision apprehend God, whom the whole world cannot contain? But the law of love is not concerned with what will be, what ought to be, what can be. Love does not reflect; it is unreasonable and knows no moderation. Love refuses to be consoled when its goal proves impossible, despises all hindrances to the attainment of its object. Love destroys the lover if he cannot obtain what he loves; love follows its own promptings, and does not think of right and wrong. Love inflames desire which impels it toward things that are forbidden. But why continue?

It is intolerable for love not to see the object of its longing. That is why whatever reward they merited was nothing to the saints if they could not see the Lord. A love that desires to see God may not have reasonableness on its side, but it is the evidence of filial love. It gave Moses the temerity to say: If I have found favor in your eyes, show me your face. It inspired the psalmist to make the same prayer: Show me your face. Even the pagans made their images for this purpose: they wanted actually to see what they mistakenly revered.

Other Suggested prayers during this time

- Read and reflect on Sunday Readings for Advent
- Read and reflect on Hymn "O Come, O Come, Emanuel"
- Read and reflect on Hymn "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus"
- Reflect on what ways you are still "waiting" for God to fulfill something in your life.