THE LITURGICAL YEAR

LIBBY: The world is made up of rhythms: the stages of human life, of birth and death, of everyday highs and lows.

KAI: The rhythm of the seasons, of sunset and sunrise.

LIBBY: The cycles of the moon, the tides, the orbits of the planets.

KAI: Held up like a mirror to all of these rhythms is a special calendar. It's the calendar of the Liturgical Year of the Catholic Church.

CATHOLIC CENTRAL OPENING TITLES

KAI: I'm Kai.

LIBBY: And I'm Libby, and today on Catholic Central, we're talking about the Church's Liturgical Year.

KAI: And, looking at the questions: Why are we talking about it; and, what does it do for me?

LIBBY: Let's start with the word liturgy. Liturgy comes from a Greek word meaning public service. The Catholic Mass is often referred to as the liturgy.

KAI: There are eight seasons in the Liturgical Year: Advent, Christmas, Ordinary Time, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost and Ordinary Time again. You might guess the year starts with Christmas or Easter, right? Wrong. Actually it starts with Advent, the four weeks leading up to Christmas.

LIBBY: Advent connects with the very human experience of hopeful beginnings, of setting out, looking forward to new life and anticipating opportunities, like getting accepted to college or planning a vacation.

KAI: Each Sunday in Advent represents a different aspect of anticipation. On the first, second and fourth Sundays, priests wear purple vestments.

LIBBY: Purple represents prayer and contemplation. Setting out on any journey, we pray and reflect, asking God to strengthen our hearts for what is to come.

KAI: On the third Sunday in Advent, the clergy wear rose vestments. Because everyone looks good in rose, am I right?

LIBBY: Because rose represents joy. In this case, the joy of what lies ahead in the manger in Bethlehem.

KAI: Which brings us to everybody's favorite season. Lent.

LIBBY: Christmas. It's Christmas. The birth of Jesus, the welcoming of new life, light and love into the world, even people who don't believe in Jesus feel that extra love that spills out everywhere from the celebrations of His birth.

KAI: Christmas, as we all know, is on December 25th. But what you might not know is that in the Catholic Church, Christmas Day is just the beginning of the celebration. The Christmas season lasts until the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus, which is in January.

LIBBY: That's why Catholics often have their decorations up long after others have taken theirs down. The traditional song, “The Twelve Days of Christmas” starts on Christmas Day and goes to the Feast of the Epiphany -- the coming of the Magi, the Three Kings, to visit Jesus. (Singing) On the first day of Christmas, my true love ...

KAI: Thank you, thank you, thank you Libby. Thank you for that so much. Thank you.

LIBBY: You're welcome. Anytime.

KAI: But that song is an example of how the symbols of Christmas have deeper meaning, like Nativity scenes portray the humble circumstances of Jesus' birth …

LIBBY: Christmas lights and candles reflect how Jesus brings the light to the darkness, and priests wear white vestments to signify the purity of Christ. And those gifts underneath the tree, they represent the Three Kings bringing gifts to the Baby Jesus.

KAI: Christmas is unique in its joy and its hope. But there are other seasons in our life, too, in which we experience this start of new life, like a honeymoon or a new job. Christmas reminds us of these phases of life that we share with God.

LIBBY: After Christmas is Ordinary Time.

KAI: Ah, good old Ordinary Time. So humble, so plain. Ho-hum.

LIBBY: Ordinary Time doesn't mean boring, it means ordered time, from the Latin *ordinalis*. It represents living life as it unfolds, and as we grow and experience in wisdom.

KAI: Liturgically, this is when we walk with Jesus. The readings at church focus on Christ's daily life and teaching.

LIBBY: Our own experiences of the ordinary can include the middle of a semester, or a time in our careers when they are no major changes. It's the experience of ourselves, others and God in ordinary ways. No big crisis, no super ecstasies … yet, these are still important times of learning and growing. Next up is everybody's most challenging season: Lent.

KAI: Christmas.

LIBBY: Seriously. What?

KAI: What? I like Lent.

LIBBY: I give up.

KAI: That's the spirit. Giving things up for Lent is part of the Lenten tradition of fasting, prayer and almsgiving, or acts of charity. It can really be great for spiritual growth, having more of the compassion that we want to have all year round.

LIBBY: Lent is the 40 days leading up to Easter. On Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, ashes are distributed to remind us of the cycle of our earthly life. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Priests wear purple vestments to represent penitence and sacrifice.

KAI: Lent represents the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the desert, tempted by the Devil. It can be a season of self-discovery for Catholics, when they can learn what they hunger for and what they are blind to, and what they need to let go of in their lives.

LIBBY: Lent isn't easy. But it's good for the soul.

KAI: Which brings us to Holy Week and the Holy Paschal Triduum. It starts with Holy Thursday, which is the celebration of the Last Supper. Then, Good Friday, the day Jesus was tried, killed on a cross and laid in a tomb. And Holy Saturday, when it seemed to the followers of Jesus that all was lost.

LIBBY: The days of Triduum speak powerfully to the experience of loss and death -- the times that seem impossible to recover from, like getting fired, failing in school or having a breakup with someone close.

KAI: It's an amazingly intense three days, and they lead to the season of Easter, the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus.

LIBBY: Which begins on the Vigil of Easter, a beautiful celebration the late night before Easter Sunday.

KAI: And my favorite Mass of the year.

LIBBY: It's great.

KAI: Fun fact, Easter falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Vernal Equinox.

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LIBBY: Whoa, trippy.

KAI: Actually we do that because the Passover Jesus celebrated on Holy Thursday would have fallen in accord with the Jewish lunar calendar. Easter, the rising of Jesus from the dead, is about renewal and rebirth -- the universal rhythm of darkness to light, winter to spring, death to new life. It's about rebuilding after something tragic and finding hope after loss.

LIBBY: And just like it takes time after losing a loved one or recuperating after a serious illness, it takes time to learn how to live out the hope of the Resurrection of Jesus. The 50 days of Easter allow us the time and space to forge new hope and new way of being.

KAI: On that 50th day after Easter comes Pentecost, which means 50th day, and which celebrates the descent of the Holy Spirit on the first Apostles.

LIBBY: The Holy Spirit is represented as breath, fire or a dove. It fills His disciples with a new power to communicate and spread the Gospel.

KAI: It can be a Pentecost experience when in our own lives, we recognize how to use the gifts that God gives us.

LIBBY: Easter is like finding acceptance in a new school. Pentecost is when we start to make friends and get involved.

KAI: And after Pentecost, we come full circle to another season of Ordinary Time. The readings and riites of the church here are a spiritual framework for the day of the greatest joy or the worst nightmare. And, always, it reminds us transformation is coming.

LIBBY: God gives new life; death is not the end of the story; and resurrection is promised. I'm Libby for Catholic Central.

KAI: And I'm Kai. Until next time, keep your eye on the calendar.

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