

# IDEAS for the TIME After PENTECOST.

## Celebrate the Year and the Faith. A Candle is Lighted.

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{This is the third part of a fascinating book recently produced by the Grail in England, We are sure many of our own readers will find the information illuminating and the suggestions well worth following through.}

### WHITSUN (PENTECOST) TO ADVENT.

FROM Whitsun to Advent, in comparison with the long holiday of Eastertide, one enters a more sober time, though here and there the feasts of Mary, particularly the great feast of the Assumption (once called: our Lady in harvest-time) (**August 15**) interrupt it. Again, one cannot help but see on these days the perpetual inclination to mark all the feasts of our Lady with some sort of flower ceremony.

Saints' feasts and angels' feasts follow on each other; Guardian Angels (**October 2**), Michael, prince of angels (**September 29**), and Raphael (**October 24**), are all honored during this time. In parts of England Michaelmas (Saint Michael's Mass Day, September 29) was celebrated as a sort of general sports day in which one man would lead a gang of followers across country, through the roughest ways he could find, a crude symbolism, probably, of Michael leading the host of angels.

If all the angels have their festive day, so too do all the saints, on **November 1st**. The vigil of this day, once probably given to invoking one's patron saints, turned in later days into a superstitious festivity in which love-charms such as nuts, apples, and glowing embers were credulously invoked and fortunes told, and future lovers seen in vision.

If all the saints have their festive day during these days, so too have all the souls. Theirs is on **November 2nd**, on which day the bells used to be rung almost unceasingly as a reminder that the members of the Church-family who were yet in prison needed to be rescued. Thus by the first

Sunday of Advent, the first day of the liturgical year, there is almost no type of person who has not been celebrated by the Church in one way or another.

### **SAINT ALBAN'S DAY: JUNE 22nd.**

Saint Alban's death came to him through the hospitality he gave to a stranger, so he is surely the model of hosts and an inspiration of hospitality. When he was still a pagan, Alban gave shelter to a priest who was being hunted by pagan persecutors. It was not long before Alban was converted by his guest, and when the soldiers ultimately arrived at his house in search of the priest it was Alban, disguised in his guest's clothes, who gave himself up to them, and who was beheaded at what is now the town of Saint Alban's in 303.

There can be no better way of marking Saint Alban's day than by imitating his hospitality. One of the things that Christ will say to his followers at the last judgment is: "I was a stranger and you took me in," and when he is asked what he means he will explain that giving hospitality to anyone is giving hospitality to him. On Saint Alban's day everyone could deliberately go out of their way to invite some lonely person to their home, and that day could give them all the attention and care and affection possible, doing it all in the honor of Saint Alban, who was willing to give even his life for the man who was his guest.

### **SAINT JOHN'S EVE: JUNE 23rd.**

This custom was still observed in Yorkshire as recently as 1826, when it was described as being of great antiquity. On Saint John's Eve, every family who had come to live in the parish within the last year would put a table outside their houses, place on it bread and cheese and beer and offer this to anyone who passed by. Any of the parish might help themselves, and if the fortunes of the family ran to it, would be invited indoors for a further supper and a festive evening spent in the family circle. By this means, the newcomers to the parish made many acquaintances and friends, and were helped to see themselves as having a definite place in the local community. One cannot advocate the setting up of tables full of food in the streets nowadays, but the chance need not be missed of helping newcomers to make friends. There are far more lonely people, often converts, in every parish than one might think. On Saint John's Eve, it could be possible to arrange an open house among the youth groups, or the different sodalities, or even in various families, to which all the newcomers in the parish could be invited, this with the definite idea of making them feel at home and part of the parish community.

### **SAINT JOHN THE BAPTISTS DAY: JUNE 24th.**

When Zachary sang his canticle in praise of his son John he said that many would rejoice in his birth, and that John would "enlighten them that sit in darkness." The Baptist's day, 'midsummer day', was a general holiday, when everyone did indeed rejoice, a day full of games and sports and dancing. On the eve of the feast, everyone's door "decorated with birch leaves, 'Saint John's wort' and white lilies and such-like, garnished upon with garlands of beautiful flowers. They had also lamps of glass, with oil burning in them all the night. . . . Some hung out branches of iron,

curiously wrought, containing hundreds of lamps lighted at once." On the day itself, no sooner had the sun sunk than fires were lighted all over the hillsides, fires long known in the 'west country' as blessing fires. To celebrate the Baptist with lights and flames was fitting enough, since it was John whom Christ himself described as "a burning and a shining light" in which the people were to rejoice.

These bonfires, often of immense height, were blessed by the priest, and often it was he who set light to them. While the fires blazed people danced and made joyful processions, holding burning torches in their hands; they sang together and played games by the light of the fire.

Saint John's day might be the signal for a festive outdoor evening in a family or club. A bonfire can be lighted; there can be games and sports, while someone can tell briefly the story of the origin of Saint John's fires.

The coming of the Baptist had been the sign that the Old Law was done away with. This abolition was symbolized, certainly somewhat crudely, by burning on the bonfires all rubbish and all unnecessary, useless and unwanted things in the house. For the many people who are terrified to dispose of anything in case they should ever need it in the future this would be an excellent custom to revive! In any case, in all homes rubbish of one sort or another accumulates, so why should we not dispose of it on a definite day, and in a ceremonial manner?

### **SAINT PETER'S DAY: JUNE 29th.**

In Yorkshire, Saint Peter's day was once a special feast of fishermen.

"Upon Saint Peter's day they invite their friends and kinsfolk to a festival kept after their fashion with a free heart and no show of niggardliness: that day their boats are dressed curiously for the show, their masts are painted, and certain rites observed around them." What these rites were, is not mentioned, save that one of them consisted in sprinkling the prows of the boats "with good liquor," a ceremony reminiscent of the christening of ships. Most probably, the whole feast grew out of a simple blessing of fishing boats.

In a family, Saint Peter's day might be observed by special prayer for fishermen and for all those on the sea. One could use this prayer from the Mass for those at sea:

"O God, who did bring our forefathers through the Red Sea and guide them in safety through the overflowing waters, singing praises to Your holy name, we humbly beseech You that You would ever keep from all danger Your servants who are on board ship, granting them a calm voyage and the haven which they desire."

### **SAINT BENEDICT'S DAY: MARCH 21st. (Now July 11th.)**

Saint Benedict is the patron of bee-keepers, and those who themselves have bees could not do better than mark his day by praying for their hives. Farmers can pray for their cattle and their

barns; fishermen for their fishing boats and the fish in the sea, why should bee-keepers do less? In some parts of France it was, and may still be, customary for bee-keepers to have a medal of Saint Benedict affixed to their hives:

"O Lord, God almighty, who has created heaven and earth and every animal existing over them and in them for the use of men, and who has commanded through the ministers of holy Church that candles made from the products of bees be lit in church during the carrying out of the sacred office in which the most holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ Your Son is made present and is received; may Your holy blessing descend upon these bees and these hives, so that they may multiply, be fruitful and be preserved from all ills and that the fruits coming forth from them may be distributed for Your praise and that of Your Son and the Holy Spirit and of the most blessed Virgin Mary."

### **SAINT ANNE'S DAY: JULY 26th.**

Saint Anne, the model grandmother, was for long the patroness of joiners and cabinet makers, and for the emblem of their guild, they took a figure of Saint Anne instructing her daughter. A curious choice, it seems at first glance.

But they entwined round the two figures this inscription: "*sic fingit tabernaculum Deo*," 'thus she frames a tabernacle for God'. These wood workers realized the parallel between themselves, the tabernacles they made, the Blessed Sacrament that was housed in them and Saint Anne, our Lady and the Child she bore.

Not only joiners took Anne as their patron; so did all those engaged in spinning, weaving, embroidery, sewing and any sort of household arts and skills. She seems indeed to have been the patron of the housewife.

It was in the East that the mother of our Lady was first honored.

The Greek Church held her in tremendous reverence and sang her praises in words that echo the *Akathist* hymn, that great song of praise written in her daughter's honor.

"Hail, spiritual bird, announcing the spring time of grace!

Hail, sheep, mother of the ewe lamb, who by a word conceived the Word, the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world!

Hail, blessed earth, whence sprang the branch that bore the divine Fruit!

O Anne, most blessed in God, grandmother of Christ our Lord, who did give to the world a shining lamp, the mother of God; together with her intercede that great may be the mercy granted to our souls.

Let us cry to holy Anne with cymbals and psaltery. She brought forth the mountain of God and was borne up to the spiritual mountains, the tabernacles of Paradise."

In England, Saint Anne's feast was authorized by Pope Urban IV in 1381. Thus, she was honored here more than two hundred years before her day was celebrated as a feast of the universal Church.

There is then nothing strange in suggesting that it be given more consideration now. Saint Anne's day is a homely feast. After all, she is the grandmother of Christ, odd though this may sound in one's ears. If mid-Lent Sunday (the fourth Sunday of Lent) is the feast of mothers, is there any reason why this should not be the day when the grandparents are made the center of everything? Gifts can be sent them, letters written, visits paid. Saint Anne has received tremendous honor at the shrines that have been set up to her. The one set up in Brittany, Saint Anne d'Auray, discovered to Yves Nicolazic by herself in 1624, is one of the greatest places of Christian pilgrimage. Here in Britain there is nothing to compete with that. There are a number of churches dedicated to her, and that is all. But to celebrate her feast day in such a practical way as that of centering it round the grandparents of a family is surely something that would appeal to one whom popular fancy has always linked up with home life.

#### **LAMMAS: AUGUST 1st.**

The word "Lammas" is said to be derived from a Saxon word signifying "loaf-Mass" or "bread-Mass"; this was the day when country people offered thanks to God for the crops, particularly for grains of all kinds. In Ireland, fruit was also brought to the church as a thank-offering.

One could follow something of this custom nowadays. Everyone with a garden could undertake to give some of his vegetables or fruit to others who need it, either giving it direct to them or asking the parish priest or the Saint Vincent de Paul society in the parish for the names of those who would welcome such gifts. (In the Southern Hemisphere Lammas is celebrated on **February 1st.**)

#### **ASSUMPTION DAY: AUGUST 15th.**

In the Eastern Church this was so important and celebrated a festival, that it was preceded by a week's fasting. In Rome the day was marked by an enormous procession, led by the pope, who went barefooted, carrying a painting of Christ from the Church of the Lateran of Saint John to the Church of Saint Mary Major, thus to commemorate the coming of Christ for his mother on Mary's death.

This is the greatest of our Lady's feast days, and one of the oldest of them. All the church's office of the day is filled with praise and acclamation of the Mother of God, who was raised from her grave, taken up body and soul into heaven, there to be made the queen of heaven. Saint Gregory of Tours says: "When the time came for the blessed Mary to leave this earth the apostles were gathered together from all lands: and having learnt that the hour was at hand they watched with

her. Now the Lord Jesus came with his angels and received her soul. In the morning, the apostles took up her body and placed it in the tomb. And again the Lord came and the holy body was taken up in a cloud."

Popular feeling, which had always linked our Lady's feasts with flowers, did not fail now. In this country of Britain the Assumption was marked by people taking huge bunches of herbs into the church to be blessed there. Flowers, plants and fruit were also blessed, as though this were the day of the garden, as distinct from the days of the fields of corn and the fodder crops. It is possible that herbs were much in evidence because of the epistle of the day:

"I was exalted like a cedar in Libanus (Lebanon) and as a cypress tree on Mount Sion (Zion).

I was exalted like a palm tree in Cades (Kadish) and as a rose plant in Jericho, as a fair olive tree in the plains and as a plane tree by the water in the streets was I exalted. I gave a sweet smell like cinnamon and aromatic balm. I yielded a sweet odor like the best myrrh."

Is it possibly connected with this herb-offering that we call two herbs balm and myrrh in this country of Britain which have no resemblance whatever to the herbs mentioned in the Mass?

Few people have herb gardens now. Still, those who have might decorate the statue of our Lady with them, perhaps decorating the statue in the parish church in the same way. The Assumption might also be an occasion for praying for the flowers and plants and fruit of the ordinary garden. What is more, why could not those who have a garden send flowers to those who cannot grow them, or to city churches and convents where every flower has to be bought? And anyone who had no garden herself could always buy flowers and send or give them to some church or chapel for this first of Mary's feast days.

### **HOLY CROSS DAY: SEPTEMBER 14th.**

September 14th commemorates the finding of the Cross by Saint Helena, and it marks the beginning of a 'Lent' in many monastic orders. In most homes there will be a cross or crucifix, but in many cases it is hardly noticed because of its very familiarity. This day might be an occasion when someone in the family undertook to make a new wooden cross and to set it up either indoors or in the garden. If in the garden, the cross could well be a large one. This does not call for much technical skill, and rough workmanship does not matter. At all events, the cross could be set up and small slats of wood bearing the names of each member of the family could be nailed across its vertical bar. Someone might explain in a few words this significance of one's own name being thus placed on Christ's cross. Then the story of the appearance of the cross in the sky shortly before Constantine won the battle of the Milvian Bridge could also be re-told, with special stress laid on the words that were written in fire round that cross: "In this sign you shall conquer!" The cross could remain until after the day of our Lady's Seven Sorrows (**September 15th**).

## **ALL SOULS DAY: 'SOUL-MASS': NOVEMBER 2nd.**

Fire has always been a symbol of immortality, and the immortality of the soul was symbolized by lighting fires during the night of All Souls; perhaps the simpler people thought that their little furze fires dotted over the hillsides would show the way to souls who were that day making their journey from purgatory to heaven!

Long after the Catholic faith had been cast out of this country of England, relics remained at 'Soul-mass' of the once universal praying for the dead, though, as was inevitable, these became empty and corrupt. Even in the 19th century girls still went "souling" from door to door; people baked and ate soul cakes, people, who would have abhorred the idea that the dead can be helped by prayers, would say on this day: "A soul cake, a soul cake, God have mercy on all Christian souls for a soul cake." A soul cake was a sort of oat cake, which, in Catholic times was baked specially as a gift for poor and needy people, and these people on receiving it would pray for the dead belonging to those who gave it.

All Souls' Day could be made the feast day of the dead members of any family. One could pray in general for all the souls in purgatory, but surely, the members of the family have first claim.

Where there are children in a family one can make a soul cake for each one and ask each to undertake to pray particularly for one dead member of the family.

When the dead are buried not too far away, an annual expedition could be made to the churchyard or cemetery with flowers, or to tidy and clear their graves. One has only to walk through any churchyard or cemetery to wish that All Souls' Day could be celebrated in such a way by the whole country! In this way, starting from a quite un-ambitious level, children could be taught to take a real interest in the welfare of the dead members of their family and could come to have a real devotion to the souls in Purgatory.

## **MARTINMAS: NOVEMBER 11th.**

Saint Martin's day once used to rival Saint John's day, so much was it given to rejoicings and festivities. So often did Martinmas bring with it a brief return of warm weather that the days around the feast are still called to this day "Saint Martin's summer." All types of people claimed Martin as their patron — "monks, priests, soldiers, knights, travelers, inn-keepers, charitable organizations of every kind." Why these last claimed Martin as patron the office of his feast makes clear: "At the age of 15 he became a soldier and served in the army, first of Constantius, afterwards of Julian. On one occasion when a poor naked man at Amiens begged an alms of him in the name of Christ, having nothing but his armor and clothing, he gave him half his military cloak. The following night Christ appeared to him clad in that half cloak, and said; 'Martin, while yet a catechumen, has clothed me with this garment'."

How better could one honor Saint Martin's day than by living it in that spirit of his?

Martin gave away half his cloak: we can go through our wardrobe and select any clothes that are

at all superfluous — if we would really resemble Martin we should give more than what can be spared — and we can immediately send or give it to someone in need, either directly, or indirectly through some organization. It is important to remember, though, that Martin gave the cloak he was actually wearing, that is to say, something that was fit to be worn. The idea is not to give away merely old clothes, but garments in such condition that we ourselves would be willing to wear them. After all, when Martin saw his cloak, not on the beggar but on Christ himself, it was reality that he saw. Any clothes, any single thing that we give to another person we are giving to Christ himself.

### **OUR LADY'S PRESENTATION: NOVEMBER 21st.**

This feast was kept for hundreds of years in the east before the west took it over; and in England, it was observed long before the rest of Europe. "The lovely Virgin being born according to the divine decrees, her parents led her to the temple, to fulfill their promise to give her to her Creator. Anne in her joy thus cried out to the priest: 'Receive this child, lead her into the most secluded parts of the temple; surround her with all care: for she was given me as the fruit of my prayers, and in the joy of my faith I promised to devote her to God her Creator'."

It is easy to see how this day, which describes Mary as entering upon a new life, to which she would bring ever greater exactness to her service of God, came to be thought a fitting occasion for priests and religious to renew their vows.

One may still commemorate the traditional life of Mary in the temple by making this day an occasion in youth groups or schools when everyone belonging to any Catholic organization renews their membership and the promises they have made on being accepted. This renewal might well be made in the church, and after the ceremony, some sort of general party or festivity could be arranged.

### **PRIEST'S SATURDAY.**

As recently as 1934, the General of the Salvatorians suggested to Pope Pius XI that one Saturday each month might become a day specially devoted to prayers for priests. Pius XI agreed wholeheartedly, declaring that he praised and blessed the suggestion, and since 1934, bishops of more than fifty European dioceses have recommended this practice.

How does one take part in Priests' Saturday? It means offering the Saturday after the First Friday of the month wholly and entirely for the sanctification of priests throughout the world; offering Mass and Holy Communion together with all the prayers, actions, joys, sorrows of the day and offering it all to Christ through the hands of Mary.

Many people probably pray for priests on the *Ember days*, which are commonly the ordination days. But then it is naturally for the newly ordained. Priests' Saturday is intended to help all priests — the Pope, the bishops, missionaries, all who teach in seminaries and schools, the contemplative religious, the parish priests.

For some people a week-day Mass will be impossible. Still they can make an offering of their whole day, and they could say this prayer at least once on Priests' Saturday:

"Divine Savior, Jesus Christ, who have entrusted your work of redemption to the priests, who take your place on earth, I offer you, through the hands of your most holy Mother, for the sanctification of your priests and future priests this whole day, all my prayers, works, joys, sacrifices and sufferings. Give us saintly priests. Grant to them apostolic hearts, filled with love for you and all the souls belonging to you, so that, being themselves sanctified in you, they may sanctify us who are entrusted to their care and bring us safely into Heaven.

Loving Jesus, bless all their priestly work and sacrifice. Bless all their prayers and words at the altar and in the confessional, in the pulpit, in the school and at the sickbed. Call many young men to the priesthood and the monastic life. Protect and sanctify all who will become your priests. And grant to the souls of the priests who have departed this life, eternal rest.

And do you, Mary, Mother of all priests, take them under your special protection and lead them ever to the highest priestly sanctity."

### **THE WAKES.**

In some parts of the country, fairs are still known as wakes. Wherever they have survived, the wakes have become completely secular in character, though once they consisted of a day of prayer and thanksgiving and feasting on the titular feast of the parish church, when all the parishioners seem to have spent the day together in the immediate neighborhood of their church. It is believed that the wakes provide another example of pagan festivity taken over by the Church.

At any rate the Venerable Saint Bede says that Pope Saint Gregory wrote to the Abbot Saint Mellitus that "whereas the people were accustomed to sacrifice many oxen to the honor of demons, let them celebrate a religious and solemn festival and slay the animals not to the devils, but to be eaten by themselves to the glory of God."

In time the spiritual element began to be swamped by the secular, the thanksgiving and praying and the visiting of the church with lighted candles burning, all began to give way before the grosser material celebrations. In the tenth century, priests were already inveighing against the abuses to which some parish wakes gave rise. The process of degeneration continued and in the end, the wakes became fairs, pure and simple.

It might be possible in a parish to revive the idea of celebrating the feast day of the titular saint. It could be made a special day of thanksgiving and all the various parish organizations and the schools could celebrate it, each in their own way, uniting, as Pope Saint Gregory suggested, a spiritual with a material celebration, though each kept in their right proportion.

## **THE SUNDAY FESTIVAL.**

This fell on the Sunday after the titular feast of the parish church. When they came back from Mass, the people had "entertainments for the reception and treating of their relations and friends, who visit them on that occasion from each neighboring town." The Sunday Festival was more than a mere day of open doors and hospitality; it was the occasion on which efforts were made to restore amity in the neighborhood, for "on this day they used to end many quarrels between neighbor and neighbor."

Even if the festive side of this day were not revived — though there is no reason why it should not be — still, the peacemaking side need not be neglected. This could be the day when everyone in the family sets about ending any disagreement or quarrel in which he is involved, quite regardless of whether or not he was to blame for the disagreement. It is probably to the point to mention that the mending of broken friendships begins, just as charity does, at home.

### **REMEMBER TOMORROW.**

BANK holidays are a poor exchange for the feasts of the Church. It means that people's noses are now kept much longer to the grindstone than they ever were in the days when the civil year was based on the liturgy. It means too that a popular, vivid, visual way of teaching the faith has almost disappeared. Those who work with young people, in schools or any sort of youth organizations, or those with families of young children are the only ones who can ensure that this way of making religion real does not vanish completely.

Many of the Church's feasts were celebrated in a childish, obvious even 'crude' way. This ought to be a recommendation, rather than a drawback. When boys and girls drift away from their faith, the reason almost always is that this faith has never been a reality to them. The popular celebrations that obtained so long in this country did indeed help to make the faith real then to those who took part; it could do so again.

It is no good approaching these celebrations in any condescending way. Admittedly it was childish to have processions with the statue of Christ, in which the Blessed Sacrament was encased, as it were, in a monstrance on Easter Day, childish to drop pieces of lighted rope from the church roofs on Whitsunday (Pentecost); equally childish is it now to go on 'maying' expeditions in honor of our Lady or to make Saint Anne's day the feast of grandparents. However, the Church has never been a society of an intellectual elite and there is the best authority in the world for believing that the kingdom of heaven is the province of those who have become like children.

Many feasts remain to be celebrated, which are not touched on in these pages. There are, for instance, all the festival days of the early bishops, monks and abbesses, people like Dunstan (**May 19**), Samson (**July 28**) and Hilda (**November 17**), of the Celtic monks, like Columba (**June 9**), of the English martyrs, led by John Fisher (**June 22**) and Thomas More (**July 6**). These islands of Britain have produced innumerable saints and yet to most people their names mean

almost nothing, instead of being an inspiration to them. How many of us know anything about Saint Alphege (**April 19**), Saint Ethelburga (one on **April 5**, another on **October 11**), Saint Winifred (**November 3**), Saint Teilo (**February 9**), Saint Illtyd (**November 6**) or Saint Edmund (**November 20**)? Who even knows with which parts of the country they are associated? Yet because these are native saints they are in a special way our possession and have a claim on us; and one could make a good beginning by attempting to celebrate the days of these and similar saints in one way or another.

Still more, the feasts of *Mary* call out for celebration; it was not for nothing that England was once known as the *dowry of Mary* — a title that has become so familiar to us now that we hardly stop to consider what is implied by it. With our Lady's feasts, as indeed with any feast, the closer the link with local surroundings the better. There are shrines and holy wells galore in this country of England. Once they drew pilgrims from many miles away. Now they are merely place names in dusty books of local history. Why should not some attempt be made to bring back the honor in which they were once held?

All this calls for warning though. It is worse than useless to decide to introduce such feasts and customs only from the outside, as it were. Then they would be no more than semi-superstitious devotions, mere pious frills that would do more harm than good.

Flowers and may blossom and altars for Mary will cut no ice if the instigator of these things does not at least attempt to practice equally Mary's love for others, her self-forgetfulness, her courage.

You may enthrone a statue of the Sacred Heart in your home and keep a lamp burning continually before it, and at the same time keep burning equally steadily a fire of resentment or dislike in your own heart. In such a case, the picture should be burned too.

Candles at Christmas, family prayers, Easter gardens, cribs, all these ought to be the result of a real love for Christ; they should spring out of it like flowers out of the soil. The outward show must have some relation to the inward spirit; otherwise, they are like a body from which the soul had fled, they are play acting and a farce. But when they spring from a genuine motive, they really are adding something to the life of the great family, of which baptism has made us members.

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