

Holy Days of Obligation

Holy Days of Obligation are special feast days of the Church when Catholics are called to participate in Mass and, as much as possible, refrain from unnecessary work that would interfere with worship, rest, and spiritual renewal. These celebrations highlight important events in the life of Jesus, Mary, and the saints. In this part of the United States, the Holy

Days of Obligation are:

- Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary — August 15
- All Saints Day — November 1
- Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary — December 8
- Christmas — December 25

The Ascension of the Lord was traditionally celebrated forty days after Easter on a Thursday. In most dioceses in the United States, the celebration has been transferred to the following Sunday, so it is no longer observed as a weekday Holy Day of Obligation. Parishes offer special Masses on Holy Days of Obligation so that the faithful can gather to celebrate these important feasts.

Several years ago the National Conference of Catholic Bishops determined that the holy days of Mary, the Mother of God (Jan. 1), the Assumption (Aug. 15) and All Saints (Nov. 1) would not be observed with the obligation of participating in Mass whenever they would be a Saturday or Monday. Whenever these holy days are a Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday then they would be observed with the obligation of participation in Mass. This decision was approved by the Vatican.

The reasoning for this decision is based upon the distances that priests in a number of areas of the country have to travel between parish or mission churches to offer Mass. If the holy days were Saturday or Monday then the priest would be involved in extensive travel in addition to Sundays.

In the past year the conference of Bishops received approval to transfer the holy days of Ascension Thursday to Sunday. The bishops of each province had to agree to this transfer before it was permissible. In Nebraska, which is the Metropolitan Province of Omaha or the dioceses of Omaha, Lincoln, Grand Island, the bishops determined that Ascension Thursday should be observed on the 40th day after Easter rather than moving it to a Sunday.

Church calendars and missalettes are printed to follow the determinations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.