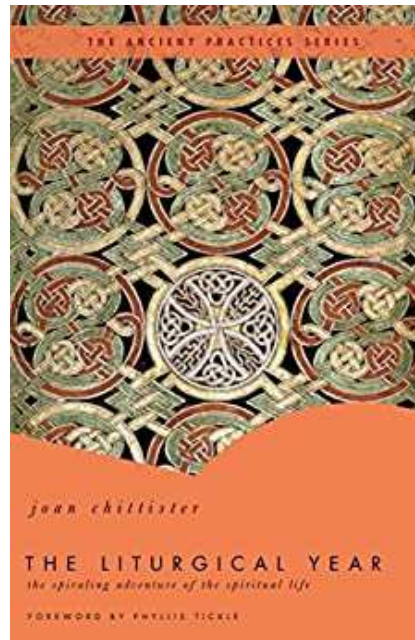


Discussion Questions

The Liturgical Year: The Spiraling Adventure Of The Spiritual Life



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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
I. Sundays	2
II. Jesus’s Life (Advent + Christmas)	3
III. Ordinary Time	3
IV. Jesus’s Death (Lent + Easter + Pentecost)	4
V. Saints, Cycles, and Feasts	5
Epilogue.....	6

Introduction

QUESTIONS:

1. As Sister Joan Chittister explores in the initial chapters of the book, the year gives structure to our lives and the liturgical year gives spiritual structure to our lives. How has the liturgical year lived in you throughout your life? Are there any annual touchpoints that mean something special to your story and development?
2. Sister Joan writes, “The liturgical year is the arena where our life and the life of Jesus intersect.” (16) What event within the liturgical year has been most meaningful to you in learning, and following, the life of Jesus?

I. Sundays

QUESTIONS:

1. *“Sunday, to the Christian mind, is a ‘little Easter.’ It is the collective memory of the moment when the tomb opened, empty of the death it promised, and new life began.” (33)*

Which spiritual or theological components of the Sunday liturgy are most meaningful to you? Is there a certain part of mass or liturgy that speaks to your soul?

2. *“Sunday is meant to be a different kind of day... we discover a bit more about who is our God.” (38)*

In what ways do you mark Sunday as a special, sacred day? Are there any personal or family traditions that help mark Sunday apart from the rest of the week?

II. Jesus's Life (Advent + Christmas)

QUESTIONS:

1. *"[The liturgical year] opens with Advent, the season that teaches us to wait for what is beyond the obvious. ... Advent makes us look for God in all those places we have, until now, ignored."* (59)

By starting the liturgical year with Advent, the season of waiting in darkness and mystery in anticipation for the coming of Christ, we are called into self-reflection and preparation. What has Advent taught you about the meaning of life? What are the stories or rituals that help guide you through the darkness and mystery of these seasons of life?

2. *"The Christmas season, if we are to see it as a whole rather than as an isolated event (and, in our age, a totally distorted and even misleading conception of the feast) can ignite the spark that will lead us through the darkness of our own lives every day of the year."* (88)

"Christmas is larger than a baby in a manger. Christmas is the coming of a whole new world." (94)

Christmas is a story of the Christ Child being born into a world that desperately needs his presence. It is the story of God becoming human on Earth. However, the depth of the story is often lost in the materialism of the secular "Christmas" celebrations today. In what ways do you remember and practice the teaching at the heart of Christmas, the story of the coming of Joy and Light which Christ represents?

III. Ordinary Time

QUESTIONS:

1. *"Ordinary Time reminds us that contemplation is the center of Christian life. It is the place where the mind of Christ and our own come to know one another, where we integrate our concerns in this world by*

attuning them to the next.” (97)

Between Christmas and Easter, and then between Easter and Christmas, the church slows down and sinks into “Ordinary Time,” which teaches us to live into the truth that “God was, is, and will come again.” How do you keep your faith alive in “Ordinary Time”? Are there sacred practices you hold throughout the year between the main Christian celebrations?

2. *“There is nothing ordinary about Ordinary Time at all. It makes dailiness, stability, fidelity, and constancy the marks of what it takes for Christians to be ‘Christian’ the rest of the year.” (188)*

Sister Joan writes that Ordinary Time represents the wisdom of “enoughness” and the wisdom of “routine.” How do these ideas play out in your spiritual life?

IV. Jesus’s Death (Lent + Easter + Pentecost)

QUESTIONS:

1. *“Lent is the period in which, learning to abstain from adoring at the shrine of the self, we come to see beyond the divinity we have made of ourselves to the divine will for all the world.” (113)*

What practices do you engage in during Lent? Do you normally give something up, or add special observances to these 40 days? How has Lent changed your outlook or lifestyle over the years?

2. *“[Easter] is the feast of Resurrection, of the redemption of life from the abyss of nothingness to the pinnacle of creation.” (159)*

“On Christmas morning we find the manger full of life; on Easter morning we find the tomb empty of death. We know the whole truth now: death is not the end, and life as we know it is only the beginning of Life. There is no suffering from which we cannot rise if we live a life centered on Jesus.” (164)

After the suffering and asceticism of Lent, and then the grief and hope

of Holy Week, we arrive at Easter: a celebration of life beyond death! Celebrating Jesus's resurrection points us to, in Sister Joan's words, "the joy of being human, the glory of God among us." (165) How do you express the experiences of loss and life that Lent and Easter move us through? What has this annual cycle of hope beyond grief taught you about your own life?

3. *"Nothing else compares to Paschaltide for bringing the whole Christian calendar to one hot point of experience. ... [It is] only here in this time, between the bursting open of the tomb and, fifty days later, the overflowing of the Holy Spirit, does the full awareness of what it is to live in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ finally dawn."* (173)

In the 50 days of Pentecost, "Alleluia" is repeated in prayer far more often than usual. It is a time of "limitless liberation" and "illumination." (176) These bright days help us make it through the rest, through a focus on the Holy Spirit alive among us. What do you learn about the Holy Spirit during these days of Pentecost? How can you take this understanding of, and connection to, the Holy Spirit into the rest of the year?

V. Saints, Cycles, and Feasts

QUESTIONS:

1. *"[The liturgical year] is also about the cloud of witnesses who have lived the life before us. By their very lives—in every era and every age—they prove to us that it is possible to be other than those around us who live to exploit life here rather than to grow in the light of the hereafter."* (192)

Are there any specific saints or models (canonized or not) that inspire you to live a committed spiritual life? What have they taught you?

2. *"Clearly, liturgy is not something created out of academic cloth. It arises out of the consciousness of a people, the needs of a culture. It*

speaks to the questions and concerns of every age and manifests to them in a common tongue the essential meanings of the faith. Perhaps that is nowhere more obvious than in the history of the Marian feasts of the liturgical year.” (202)

“At the beginning of the twenty-first century, personal devotion to Mary is keen.” (206)

There are many moments to celebrate Mary, the mother of Jesus, throughout the liturgical year. Did you learn about them, or practice them, growing up? Do you now? If you have, how has devotion to Mary changed your understanding of the Christian tradition?

Epilogue

QUESTIONS:

1. *“Like a great waterwheel, the liturgical year goes on relentlessly irrigating our souls, softening the ground of our hearts, nourishing the soil of our lives until the seed of the Word of God itself begins to grow in us, comes to fruit in us, ripens in us the spiritual journey of a lifetime.” (209)*

How has this book affected your understanding of the liturgical year? Are there any new practices that you will try on in the year ahead? Name 1-3 things you learned or new celebrations that you will carry with you into the next cycle of the liturgical year.