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THE SEASON OF SEPTUAGESIMA, AND VIGILS AND OCTAVES,
IN THE
EXTRAORDINARY FORM

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From the General Introduction

These papers, commissioned by the International Federation *Una Voce*, are offered to stimulate and inform debate about the 1962 Missal among Catholics ‘attached to the ancient Latin liturgical tradition’, and others interested in the liturgical renewal of the Church. They are not to be taken to imply personal or moral criticism of those today or in the past who have adopted practices or advocated reforms which are subjected to criticism. In composing these papers we adopt the working assumption that our fellow Catholics act in good will, but that nevertheless a vigorous and well-informed debate is absolutely necessary if those who act in good will are to do so in light of a proper understanding of the issues.

The authors of the papers are not named, as the papers are not the product of any one person, and also because we prefer them to be judged on the basis of their content, not their authorship.

The International Federation *Una Voce* humbly submits the opinions contained in these papers to the judgement of the Church.

Septuagesima, and Vigils & Octaves: Abstract

The calendar of the Extraordinary Form contains a number of features not found in the Ordinary Form, notably the season of Septuagesima, the number and treatment of vigils, and the number of octaves. Before the reform of 1955 there was a much greater number of vigils and octaves. These very ancient features of the calendar allowed the Faithful to enter more deeply into the mysteries presented by the Church’s year by facilitating their preparation for and subsequent meditation upon those mysteries. They also contributed to a liturgical cycle characterised by sharper contrasts of penitential and joyful days and seasons.

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FIUV POSITION PAPER 20: SEPTUAGESIMA, AND VIGILS AND OCTAVES, IN THE EXTRAORDINARY FORM

1. The season of Septuagesima, and vigils and octaves, formed an important part of the ancient Latin liturgical tradition. They are found in the 1962 calendar, though the number of vigils and octaves was greatly reduced in 1956.¹ This paper aims to explain the role of these features of the historic calendars. Many of the points made in this paper would also be applicable to the Ember Days and Rogation Days, but reasons of space make it impossible to treat them here.

History of Septuagesima

2. The season comprises the Sundays (and the weeks they begin) of Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and Quinquagesima, as a period of preparation for Lent. During this time, although the Lenten rules of fasting do not apply, the liturgical colour is the violet of penance, and the joyful *Alleluia* and *Gloria in Excelsis* are not used.² This, and the other proper texts of the season, express the penitential character of the period.
3. A preparatory period before Lent was already becoming established in the Roman liturgy in the time of Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604): in the 6th century this extended to Sexagesima Sunday, and it was later extended a further week to Septuagesima.³ The Gospel readings, in particular, prepare the Faithful for the Lenten and Easter seasons.⁴
4. The importance of the three Sundays is indicated by the location of the Papal Mass on these days, the three basilicas outside the ancient walls of Rome: respectively St Lawrence, St Paul, and St Peter. The Office begins the Book of Genesis on Septuagesima, which is continued on the Sundays of Lent.
5. The names of these Sundays indicate roughly the time before Easter, in parallel with Quadragesima, the First Sunday of Lent. ‘Septuagesima’ recalls the 70 years of the Babylonian Exile, as was noted by the medieval liturgical commentator Amalarius.⁵
6. The Eastern Rites also have a pre-Lent season, also of great antiquity: Meatfare Sunday, introduces abstinence from meat; Cheesefare Sunday introduces abstinence from eggs and milk products.
7. The season of Septuagesima is to be found in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* and in the historic practice of many Lutheran churches.

¹ The decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites reforming vigils and octaves, *Cum nostra*, was promulgated in 1955 and came into effect in 1956. See also Appendix A.

² The Alleluia is replaced, as for Lent, with a Tract.

³ Lauren Pristas “Parachuted into Lent” *Usus Antiquior* Vol 1 n.2, 2010, pp95-109, p96, citing Camille Callewaert and St Gregory the Great: Cf. *Homiliae in evangelia* XIX.1 and Callewaert, *L'oeuvre liturgique de S. Grégoire: la septuagésime et l'alléluia* (Louvain: Université catholique de Louvain, 1937) p648 and n.46.

⁴ The Gospel readings for the three Sundays are, respectively, the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16), the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23), and Jesus’ Going to Jerusalem, with the Cure of Bartimaeus (Luke 18:31-43).

⁵ Amalarius *De ecclesiasticis officiis* I.1, PL 105.993ff

8. The Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, discussed the seasons of the Church's year as follows:

The liturgical year is to be revised so that the traditional customs and discipline of the sacred seasons shall be preserved or restored to suit the conditions of modern times; their specific character is to be retained, so that they duly nourish the piety of the faithful who celebrate the mysteries of Christian redemption, and above all the paschal mystery.⁶

9. It is surprising, therefore, that the Consilium following the Council decided to abolish the season of Septuagesima, particularly as it is part of the preparation for Easter. Archbishop Annibale Bugnini recalled the discussion in a footnote:

There was disagreement on the suppression of the Septuagesima season. Some saw these weeks as a step toward Easter. On one occasion Pope Paul VI compared the complex made up of Septuagesima, Lent, Holy Week and Easter Triduum, to the bells calling people to Sunday Mass. The ringing of them an hour, a half-hour, fifteen and five minutes before the time of Mass has a psychological effect and prepares the faithful materially and spiritually for the celebration of the liturgy. Then, however, the view prevailed that there should be a simplification: it was not possible to restore Lent to its full importance without sacrificing Septuagesima, which is an extension of Lent.⁷

Rationale of the older calendars

10. On the motivation for the change, the reasoning seems to have been that the season of Septuagesima's penitential character—the use of violet and the suppression of the *Alleluia* and *Gloria*—confused the Faithful and detracted from Lent. The liturgical scholar Lauren Pristas comments:

A period of preparation necessarily heightens, not diminishes, the importance of whatever event is being prepared for; in addition, preparation generally assures a fuller or better participation in the event itself.

11. The penitential season of Lent's great importance requires careful preparation: to omit this holds the danger that the Faithful will find themselves trying to adjust, and even to decide what form their Lenten observance will take, in Lent itself. Furthermore, the season contains a particularly ancient and rich liturgy. The liturgical scholar László Dobszay, with other proponents of the 'Reform of the Reform', has suggested restoring

⁶ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 107: 'Annus liturgicus ita recognoscatur ut, servatis aut restitutis sacrorum temporum traditis consuetudinibus et disciplinis iuxta nostrae aetatis condiciones, ipsorum indoles nativa retineatur ad fidelium pietatem debite alendam in celebrandis mysteriis Redemptionis christianae, maxime vero mysterio paschali.'

⁷ Annibale Bugnini *The Reform of the Liturgy* 1948-1975 (English Edition: Collegeville MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990) p307 n6. In the main text, speaking of decisions of the Consilium in 1965, he writes that 'by and large the present texts will remain in place'. This, however, although favoured by the consultors whose views had been sought, proved impossible. The plan of a continuous series of Sundays of 'Ordinary Time' before and after Lent and the Easter season, meant that the Sunday which falls, in one year, immediately before Lent would, in another year, fall after Pentecost, or several weeks before Lent. Having decided to abolish Septuagesima as a separate liturgical season, the Mass formularies could not be retained in an appropriate place, and were lost. The process of discussion and the outcome are discussed in detail by Pristas *op. cit.*

the season in the Ordinary Form.⁸ The season of Septuagesima is found in the recently promulgated calendar of the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham.

The History and Rationale of Vigils and Octaves

12. Vigils form a very ancient feature of the Roman calendar. In origin, it is conventional to distinguish the ‘old Roman’ custom of a night vigil, a service of readings and prayers which led up to the celebration of Mass at dawn, which is attested in Rome and elsewhere in the Latin West from the 4th century,⁹ and the Greek custom of a ‘fore-feast’, which anticipates and prepares for a feast. The feast of the Nativity of Our Lord has both kinds of vigils: the Midnight Mass, and a separate vigil Mass for the day before Christmas. The liturgical commentator Bl Ildefonsus Schuster proposed that when the custom of celebrating dawn Masses became inconvenient, the dawn Mass was used for vigil Mass, and a new Mass formulary had to be created for the feast day itself.¹⁰
13. Vigils continued to be created with celebration taking place on the morning of the day before the feast. The purpose of such vigils is, as Parsch puts it, to be ‘a day of preparation, a day of spiritual acclimation and interior purification.’¹¹ The liturgy is generally penitential, and frequently explores a specific aspect of the feast which might be neglected in the main celebration.
14. A period of penitential preparation for an event of special spiritual importance has important scriptural roots, and is found in its fullest liturgical expression in Advent and Lent.¹² The vigils of the ancient calendar fulfil this role for the more important feasts of the rest of the year.
15. Octaves of celebration are found in the both the Old and New Testament in relation to the Temple cult.¹³ The symbolic explanation of the octave given by John of Ivry

⁸ László Dobszay *The Restoration and Organic Development of the Roman Rite* (London: T&T Clark, 2010) p133

⁹ The celebration of the Vigil of St Lawrence is mentioned in the Life of St Melania the Younger, who as a child was not allowed to attend it being too young (see Pius Parsch *The Church's Year of Grace* (English Edition: Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1962) Vol. 4 p304). Ildefonsus Schuster *The Sacramentary* (English Edition: London, Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1929) Vol. IV p2: ‘Thus we know from Pontius, a deacon attached to St Cyprian, that at Carthage the anniversary of a martyr was preceded by ...a night vigil, and we gather from the *Acta* of St Saturninus of Toulouse that his *natalis* was celebrated not only by a night vigil, but by the singing of hymns and the offering of the holy Sacrifice at early dawn.’

¹⁰ See Schuster *op. cit.* Vol. IV p263. A process like this certainly took place with Ember Saturdays: the Mass today (in the Extraordinary Form) celebrated on the Saturday was formerly a vigil service of lections and prayers, followed by a Mass celebrated at dawn; the Mass used today on the Sunday shares the same Gospel, and is of later composition.

¹¹ Parsch *op. cit.* Vol. IV p318

¹² Prosper Guéranger notes: ‘Moses fasted for forty days in preparation for receiving the Ten Commandments (Ex 34:28). The prophet Daniel fasted for three weeks before receiving his vision (Dan 10:2-6). Elijah the prophet fasted forty days before God spoke to him (1 Kings 19:8). And we all know that Christ our Saviour fasted for forty days in preparation for His temptation by the devil and for the beginning of His ministry (Mt 4:1-11, Lk 4:1-13).’ *The Liturgical Year* (English Edition: Great Falls, MT: St Bonaventure Publications, 2000) Vol. I p469.

¹³ Leviticus 23:36 enjoins, of the Feast of Tabernacles: ‘The eighth day also shall be most solemn and most holy: and you shall offer holocausts to the Lord.’ (‘dies quoque octavus erit celeberrimus atque sanctissimus et offeretis holocaustum Domino’). This pattern was followed in Solomon’s dedication of

(d.1079) was read at Matins¹⁴ on the octave of the Dedication of a Church in the Office before 1956:

The chief feasts are celebrated over eight days, because the world evolves over six ages. The seventh age is the rest of the holy souls until the general resurrection. The eighth is the Kingdom of God after the eternal resurrection. And for this reason the octave day is observed with greater solemnity, namely because the glory of Christ will be eternal in that kingdom, and joy will be unspeakable. And as we celebrate the Saints' feasts again, we share in the joy of the souls' rest on the day of their solemnity, and in their glory onto resurrection in their octave day.¹⁵

The connection between the octave celebration and the life of heaven is reflected in some of the octaves' proper texts.

16. Pius Parsch gives a practical explanation:

Mother Church is a good psychologist; she understands human nature perfectly. When a feast comes, the soul is amazed and not quite prepared to think profoundly upon its mystery; but on the following days the mind finds it easy to consider the mystery from all sides, sympathetically and deeply; and an eighth day affords a wonderful opportunity to make a synthesis of all points covered.¹⁶

17. Clearly, there is a limit to the number of vigils and feasts which can, without impeding each other and other feasts, be included in the calendar, and the problem has been addressed in successive reforms of the calendar, notably that of 1910.¹⁷ The reform of 1955 was, however, a far more radical pruning than anything before or after it, and the case for the restoration of many ancient vigils and octaves is strong. The Ordinary Form itself includes a vigil Mass for the Epiphany, which was one of those abolished in the 1955 reform.¹⁸

Conclusion

18. An important aspect of the liturgical year is the balance between joyful and penitential aspects. One aspect of this is the discipline on fasting, which is not treated in this

the Temple (I Kings 8:65-66, 2 Chronicles 7:8-9), and Our Lord took part in the feast during his active ministry. John 7:37: 'And on the last, and great day of the festivity, Jesus stood and cried, saying: If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink.' ('In novissimo autem die magno festivitatis stabat Jesus, et clamabat dicens: Si quis sitit, veniat ad me et bibat.') These precedents were noted by Guéranger, *op. cit.* Vol. I p469.

¹⁴ In the Second Nocturn. It is there attributed to Pope Felix IV (d.530), *De consecratione*, dist. 1, cc. 2 and 17.

¹⁵ John of Ivry, *De officiis ecclesiasticis*, PL 147, col. 42C: 'Ideo praecipuae festivitates octo diebus coluntur, quia sex aetatibus vergitur mundus; septima aetas est usque ad universalem resurrectionem requies animarum sanctarum; octava, regnum Dei post resurrectionem sempiternam: et ideo octava dies agitur celebrior, quia in ipso regno Christi gloria erit sempiterna, et ineffabilis exsultatio. Et iterum dum sanctorum festa celebramus, in die solemnitatis eorum animarum requiei congaudemus, in octavo eorum in gloria resurrectioni.'

¹⁶ Parsch *op. cit.* Vol. I p244

¹⁷ The highest-ranking form of octave prevents any other feast being celebrated during the octave; even with lower-ranking forms, the octave day itself, like a vigil, can clash with other feasts. See Appendix A for examples of such clashes.

¹⁸ In the context of the Ordinary Form, such a vigil Mass can only be celebrated on the evening of the day preceding the feast: see Appendix A.

paper;¹⁹ another is the strictly liturgical aspect, in which the joy of great feasts is extended and explored, but also contrasted with a day or season of (in Parsch's phrase) 'interior purification', when the liturgical colour is purple and the liturgy reminds us of our need for forgiveness and grace.

19. It is generally true that the discipline of the Church demanded more in the way of penance in earlier times, and this is reflected in penitential aspects of the liturgy. However, it would be most accurate to say that the calendar of the 1962 Missal, and even more so the calendar before 1956, compared with that of 1970, presents a series of sharper contrasts of penance and celebration. This is partly because of a greater emphasis on the sanctoral cycle in general.²⁰ Equally important, however, is the extended celebration of feasts with octaves, balancing the more frequent or prolonged periods of preparation, with vigils and with the season of Septuagesima. This may be called part of the genius of the ancient Latin liturgical tradition as it has developed, in which it is similar to the Byzantine liturgy. It presents to the Faithful a richly varying fare, to draw us out of ourselves and into a deeper identification with the themes of the Church's year.

¹⁹ Though see Appendix A below.

²⁰ See Positio 15: 'The Lectionary of the Extraordinary Form', 9

Appendix A: Vigils and Octaves in the Reforms of 1955 and 1970

Feasts with vigils and / or octaves before the reform of 1955, which came into effect in 1956. Those not abolished in that reform, and therefore found in the 1962 Calendar, are in bold.

Fixed feasts

Jan 6: Epiphany: vigil & octave
(Jan 21: St Agnes: **octave**)²¹
Feb 24: St Matthias: vigil
June 24: Nativity of St John the Baptist: **vigil** & octave
June 29: SS Peter & Paul: **vigil**²² & octave
July 25: St James the Apostle: vigil
Aug 10: St Lawrence: **vigil**²³ & octave
Aug 15: Assumption: **vigil** & octave
Aug 24: St Bartholomew: vigil²⁴
Sept 8: the Nativity of Mary: octave
Sept 21: St Matthew the Evangelist: vigil²⁵
Oct 28: SS Simon and Jude, Apostles: vigil
Nov 1: All Saints: vigil and octave
Nov 30: St Andrew the Apostle: vigil
Dec 8: Immaculate Conception: vigil & octave
Dec 21: St Thomas the Apostle: vigil
Dec 25: Nativity of Our Lord: **vigil & octave**
Dec 26: Saint Stephen: octave
Dec 27: Saint John the Evangelist: octave
Dec 28: Holy Innocents: octave

Movable feasts:

Easter: vigil²⁶ & **octave**
Solemnity of St Joseph: octave²⁷
Ascension: **vigil** & octave
Pentecost: **vigil & octave**
Corpus Christi: octave
Sacred Heart: octave

²¹ The second feast of St Agnes on 29th January is not generally called an octave, but certainly resembles one. The two feasts, of great antiquity, are described respectively as of her 'passion' and her (heavenly) 'nativity' in the Gelasian sacramentary and the Würzburg gospel list; their designation as 'primo' and 'secundo', used in the 1962 calendar, comes from the Gregorian Sacramentary, where the feasts are also found. See W.H. Frere *Studies in Early Roman Liturgy* Vol. I: *The Kalendar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), p. 89.

²² The same day as the feast of St Irenaeus.

²³ The same day as the feast of St Jean Vianney.

²⁴ The same day as the feast of St Philip Benizi.

²⁵ The same day as the feast of St Eustace and Companions.

²⁶ In 1955 the Easter Vigil was moved from the day before Easter Sunday to after midnight (unless anticipated) of Easter Sunday itself.

²⁷ This was celebrated on the third Wednesday after Easter; it was abolished, in favour of the feast of St Joseph the Worker on 1st May, in 1955; St Joseph the Worker does not have an Octave.

Local feasts

Titular of the church: octave

Dedication of the church: octave

Titular of the cathedral: octave

Dedication of the cathedral: octave

Patron Saint:²⁸ octave

All the vigils celebrated before 1956 called for the use of violet vestments, except the vigils of the Epiphany and the Ascension, which were celebrated in white vestments. The 1917 Code of Canon Law (canon 1252) called for fasting and abstinence on four vigils: those of Pentecost, the Assumption, All Saints, and the Nativity of Our Lord.²⁹

Between 1910 and 1955 octaves were ranked as Privileged (of the First, Second, or Third Rank), Common, or Simple: in the highest grade no other feasts were celebrated during the octave, in the lowest only the eighth day was marked. In each case the octave day sees a celebration related to the feast, either a repetition of the Mass of the feast, or with a Mass formulary proper to the octave.

Of the 15 feasts which had vigils before 1956, four vigils coincided with another important feast, as noted in footnotes in the above list. In these cases the vigil could be celebrated in private Masses, and in collegiate churches both feasts would be celebrated in different public Masses. The feasts which would clash with the five vigils retained after 1956 were moved. Similarly, efforts were made to reduce the number of feasts which were celebrated in the remaining octaves.³⁰

In the 1970 Calendar, the concept of a vigil Mass as the liturgy of the day preceding a feast is not found; instead, we find a 'Proper Vigil', 'which is to be used on the evening of the preceding day, if an evening Mass is celebrated'.³¹ With reference to 2008 *Missale Romanum*, the list of Proper Vigils is as follows:

Fixed feasts

6 January: Epiphany

24 June: Nativity of St John the Baptist

29 June: SS Peter & Paul

15 Aug: Assumption

25 Dec: Nativity of Our Lord

²⁸ As the liturgist J.B. O'Connell explains (in his Glossary of Liturgical Terms): 'The saint chosen by a place (country, province, diocese, city, town) or by a moral person (a society), and constituted by approbation of the Holy See, as an object of special honour, and as that place's or person's particular advocate with God.' J.B. O'Connell *The Celebration of Mass: a study of the rubrics of the Roman Missal* (Milwaukee WI: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1964). Cf. 1917 Code of Canon Law 1268.

²⁹ In addition, this canon mandated fasting and abstinence on Ash Wednesday, all Fridays and Saturdays of Lent, and Ember Days. Abstinence without fasting was required on non-Lent Fridays, and fasting without abstinence on all the other days of Lent, barring only days of precept. Should a feast fall on a Monday, the vigil was celebrated on the Saturday, but without fasting.

³⁰ Cf. Pius Parsch *op. cit.* Vol. 1 p232 'It used to be rather disturbing to celebrate the feasts of St Thomas and St Sylvester during the Christmas octave; they have no inherent connection with the feast. With the reform of 1960, however, they have been reduced to commemorations, allowing for a more prolonged meditation on the Christmas mystery.'

³¹ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal: Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the General Roman Calendar*, 11

Moveable feasts

Ascension of Our Lord

Pentecost

This differs from the list of vigils found in the 1962 Missal in excluding the feast of St Lawrence, and including the Epiphany. The Vigil of the Epiphany had been abolished in 1955.

A vigil in the sense of a Mass held during the night before the dawning of the feast day, which in practice are often celebrated on the evening before the feast, also exist for Easter and the Nativity of Our Lord (in the latter case, in addition to the 'Proper Vigil').

In the 1970 Calendar octaves exist for Easter and the Nativity of Our Lord, differing from the 1962 Calendar in excluding Pentecost.

Appendix B: Losses to the Chant Repertoire in the 1955 Reform

Most of the chants used for the vigils and proper octaves abolished in 1955 are found elsewhere in the Church's year, and so continue to form part of the Chant repertoire used in the Extraordinary Form, but others are not, unless they happen to be used for local feasts or those of religious orders. These are as follows.

Common of the Vigils of the Apostles

(used for the Apostles St Matthew, St James, St Bartholomew, and St Thomas)

Introit: *Ego autem sicut oliva*

Vigil of All Saints

Introit: *Iudicant sancti*

Gradual: *Exsultabunt sancti in gloria*

Vigil of St Andrew

Introit: *Dominus secus mare*

Communion: *Dicit Andreas Simoni*

Vigil of SS Simon & Jude

Gradual: *Vindica Domine sanguinem*

Octave of SS Peter & Paul

Alleluia: V. *Vos estis qui permansistis*

Vigil of the Immaculate Conception

Introit: *Venite, audite, et narrabo*

Gradual: *Sapientia aedificavit*

Offertory: *Ego dilecto meo*

Communion: *Quae est ista*

The chants for the feast of the Immaculate Conception are of relatively recent composition, but the other chants listed are nearly all from the oldest identifiable

stratum of the chant repertoire, before the year 800.³² Dom Dominic Johner, in his commentary on the Roman Gradual (which unfortunately does not treat the vigils and octaves directly), calls the Communion Antiphon of the Vigil of St Andrew, *Dicit Andreas Simoni*, ‘one of the gems of the Graduale’.³³

Five of these chants have been restored to use in the 1974 *Graduale Romanum*,³⁴ an example of the restoration of elements of the liturgy ‘to the vigour which they had in the days of the holy Fathers’³⁵ called for by the Second Vatican Council. Their absence from the books used for the Extraordinary Form is very regrettable.

³² The exception is *Alleluia V. Vos estis*. This is however found in fifteen chant books dating from before the end of the eleventh century: see Karl-Heinz Schlager *Thematischer Katalog der ältesten Alleluia-Melodien* (Munich: W. Rieke, 1965) pp217-8.

³³ Dom Dominic Johner *Chants of the Vatican Graduale*, translated from the German by the monks of St John’s Abbey (Collegeville MN: St John’s University Press, 1940) p356.

³⁴ Namely the Introits ‘*Ego autem*’, ‘*Iudicant sancti*’, and ‘*Dominus secus mare*’, the Gradual ‘*Exsultabunt sancti*’, and the Communion ‘*Dicit Andreas Simoni*’.

³⁵ Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 50: ‘elements which have suffered injury through accidents of history are now to be restored to the vigour which they had in the days of the holy Fathers, as may seem useful or necessary.’ (‘restituantur vero ad pristinam sanctorum Patrum normam nonnulla quae temporum iniuria deciderunt, prout opportuna vel necessaria videantur.’)