

How do worship and festivals shape Catholic faith?

Lauren: Hello and welcome to the Bitesize GCSE Religious Studies podcast. I'm journalist and broadcaster Lauren Layfield. I am your host for this series where we'll be going over the key beliefs and practices for your GCSE on Catholic Christianity.

In this episode we're breaking down how a Catholic's faith is shaped through worship and festivals.

And I'm here with author, teacher and broadcaster, Bobby Seagull. Hi Bobby!

Bobby: Thanks, Lauren! Hi everyone. Catholic Christian worship and festivals play a central role in my faith and have deeply shaped me. Not only do they teach key lessons, but they also strengthen the values that guide my everyday life.

Lauren: Love it. Before we begin, you might want to keep a pen and paper handy, or open your notes app, so you can jot down anything useful along the way.

Bobby: And then we'll finish with a short recap quiz.

Lauren: And don't forget, there are loads of podcasts to help with your GCSEs, just search for Bitesize GCSE on BBC Sounds.

Bobby: Ok ready to go!

Lauren: Let's start by looking at worship - Catholics use different types of worship to mean different things.

Bobby: That's right. Worship is a moment for Catholics to demonstrate devotion to God. We are encouraged by the Church to praise God, to give thanks or reach out for forgiveness. All of this can be done either alone or as part of communal worship.

Lauren: And prayer is part of worship, isn't it?

Bobby: Absolutely. Prayer is a really significant form of worship. Some Catholics might describe prayer as a conversation with God.

Lauren: And are there different types of prayer Bobby?

Bobby: Yes! Private, personal prayer is another form of worship and an unstructured way of connecting with God. For example, grabbing a spare moment in the day to reflect and perhaps read the Bible. In my family, faith was very visible - my mum praying over me before I would rush off to exams, saying the Rosary together during difficult times. That kind of everyday worship really shapes you.

Lauren: That's so thoughtful. What about communal prayer?

Bobby: Communal prayer brings believers together, strengthens identity and connects worshippers - it creates a shared sense of belonging.

Lauren: Does the Catholic Christian faith practise communal prayer?

Bobby: Yes. This is a form of public worship, known as liturgical worship, which usually takes place in a church during a service.

Lauren: Can you define liturgical worship?

Bobby: Liturgical worship is a repeated ritual following a set structure, creating unity, ensuring uniformity of worship and is the same each time.

Lauren: So Mass is one example of Liturgical worship.

Bobby: Yes - just take a listen to this hymn.

Bobby: Those words you just heard are from a liturgical prayer you'd hear in Mass. Mass is a weekly act of worship for many Catholic Christians. The service will vary from week to week depending on the Church calendar, but the basic order always remains the same.

Lauren: And Mass includes the Eucharist, is that right? And Catholic Christians who are ready to receive Holy Communion take part in sharing the bread and wine.

Bobby: That's right. Mass has two main parts. The first is the Liturgy of the Word, which includes readings from the Bible, a homily which means sermon, and reciting the Nicene Creed.

Lauren: Sounds like a time to reflect?

Bobby: Exactly. And the second part of mass is the liturgy of the Eucharist.

Let me read this quote from the Book of Luke chapter 22 verse 19:

"Do this in remembrance of me."

Bobby: These words are said within the Eucharistic Prayer by the priest during every Catholic Mass, it's a way of remembering Jesus' words and actions at the Last Supper and also His sacrifice of being crucified.

Lauren: It sounds like a really significant moment.

Bobby: Receiving Eucharist is a really important part of my practice. It's a real moment for me to show my love of Jesus and give thanks and remind me that I am part of the wider Christian family.

Lauren: The Eucharistic prayer is an example of a significant set prayer that's part of liturgical worship. Bobby, can you tell us about set prayers?

Bobby: Set prayers tend to have the same four parts to them.

Adoration which means celebrating God's power and glory while recognising our reliance on Him.

Confession - this is the act of appealing to God's compassion and asking him to be forgiving and merciful.

Thanksgiving - expressing gratitude to God for everything we have.

Supplication - reaching out to God and requesting His advice or support. There is also asking God to help others who need it.

Lauren: That makes a great acronym: A-Adoration, C-Confession, T-Thanksgiving, S-Supplication. ACTS. This is a useful way to remember the different parts of set prayers.

Bobby: The Our Father Prayer is an example of a very significant set prayer. Jesus taught His disciples this prayer, using the exact words we hear today. Catholics commonly recite it to show their devotion to God.

Lauren: Let's take a look at the significance of festivals. Festivals are a way for Catholics to come together for a public act of worship, to reflect and celebrate their faith.

Bobby: That's right. The Church year is split into different seasons and festivals as a way of remembering Jesus - His birth, teachings, death, and resurrection. This calendar of events is also known as the liturgical year and breaks down into liturgical seasons.

Lauren: And this calendar gives many Catholic Christians anchor points throughout the year?

Bobby: Correct. Two of the most significant festivals are Advent and Christmas which celebrate the birth of Jesus, and Easter which celebrates His resurrection - these are the key ones to remember.

Lauren: Let's look at Advent first and why it's significant.

Bobby: Advent begins around the end of November. It lasts about four weeks and includes four Sundays. It's a season of hopeful expectation, and you might see traditions like Advent wreaths and candles in churches and homes. Growing up, we had an Advent wreath at home, and each Sunday we'd light a new candle and say a short prayer together as a family.

It made the countdown to Christmas feel reflective rather than just about presents. During this season, Catholics prepare their homes and hearts for the celebration of Jesus' birth at Christmas.

Lauren: What does the word 'Advent' mean?

Bobby: Advent means 'coming' or 'drawing near.' Lots of Catholic Christians attend Midnight Mass on the 24th December at the end of advent and sing hymns, like this one...

Bobby: That hymn we just heard is a way for Catholics to welcome Christmas Day. Christmas means 'Christ's Mass' and for Catholics and most Christians it is the celebration of the birth of Jesus and is celebrated on December 25th.

Lauren: Now we move through the calendar from winter to Spring and onto Easter, which for many Catholic Christians is a significant festival.

Bobby: Yes - Catholic Christianity teaches that Easter is central to the faith because it celebrates Jesus' resurrection. It is a joyful season. The period leading up to Easter is called Lent, which lasts for 40 days.

Lauren: The 40 days commemorates the time Jesus spent fasting and praying in the wilderness?

Bobby: That's right.

Lauren: Many Catholics observe Lent to imitate this period, don't they?

Bobby: Yes. During Lent, Catholics are encouraged to reflect, pray, and turn away from sin as they prepare for the celebration of Easter.

Lauren: And this is called penitence?

Bobby: Correct. It's always been a period of self-denial - in the past that meant food, but these days it covers a whole range of things. As a teenager, I used to give up playing football computer games - which was very hard!

Lauren: That's really interesting. What happens at the end of Lent?

Bobby: The last week in Lent is called Holy Week. This is the week leading up to Easter Sunday and there are special services held in Catholic Christian churches across the week

Lauren: Can you give me examples of the services?

Bobby: Absolutely. There's Palm Sunday which marks the start of Holy Week. And there's Maundy Thursday which is also known as Holy Thursday which commemorates the Last Supper.

Lauren: What other services mark Holy Week?

Bobby: We have Good Friday which marks Jesus' crucifixion and death. And Holy Saturday which starts an evening vigil into Easter Sunday morning.

Lauren: Easter Sunday marks Jesus' resurrection.

Bobby: Yes, it's a really joyful day. The joy and celebration link back to that key belief that Jesus rose again.

Lauren: For more detail on how Catholics celebrate Easter, just search 'Bitesize GCSE Religious Studies, Catholic Easter.'

Bobby: Are you ready for a quiz, Lauren?

Lauren: Let's see what I've remembered!

Bobby: Ok three quick-fire-quiz questions, ready, Lauren?

Lauren: Go for it!

Bobby: Tell me one way the Our Father prayer is significant.

Lauren: It is the prayer taught by Jesus.

Bobby: Yes! Name two significant festivals celebrated by Catholic Christians

Lauren: Christmas and Holy week

Bobby: Correct! You can also say Easter festival as another possible answer. Don't forget Holy Week happens in the lead up to Easter! And finally, Lauren, which quote from the Book of Luke chapter 22 verse 19 sums up why many Catholics celebrate Mass?

Lauren: "Do this in remembrance of me."

Bobby: Full marks again!

Lauren: Thanks for listening to this episode of the Bitesize GCSE Religious Studies podcast.

Bobby: In the next episode we'll look at exam skills and bring together all the knowledge you have gained from these first four episodes to tackle the exam.

Lauren: And don't forget, you can find a full range of podcasts covering loads of GCSE subjects like Chemistry as well as Religious Studies. Just go to BBC Sounds and search for Bitesize GCSE. Thanks for listening, catch you next time!