

Guidance offered to resolve conflicts in liturgical calendar this year

Nancy Frazier O'Brien Catholic News Service | Oct. 11, 2010

WASHINGTON -- The earthly calendar is causing some conflicts in the liturgical calendar as 2010 heads to a close.

The third Sunday of Advent falls this year on Dec. 12, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe -- important to many U.S. Catholics, and especially Mexican-Americans. But because Sundays take precedence over feast days, only the readings for the third Sunday of Advent may be used on that day.

Later in December, Christmas falls on a Saturday, as does the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God on New Year's Day in 2011.

That raises problems with Saturday evening Masses, since Christmas evening is usually dedicated to family celebrations and it may be difficult to find enough altar servers, musicians and lectors, the Secretariat of Divine Worship of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops noted in a recent newsletter.

The U.S. bishops' Committee on Divine Worship recently considered a request to permit the celebration of the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe when it falls on a Sunday, but decided not to do so. But that does not mean attention cannot be paid to Our Lady of Guadalupe during Dec. 12 Masses, the secretariat said in an earlier newsletter.

"The placement of her image in the liturgical space can call attention to this celebration," it said. "Intentions in the prayer of the faithful may appropriately include themes reflecting concern for unity in the Americas and may conclude with the collect customarily used for the Mass of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Processions in honor of Our Lady may take place as well."

In addition, the secretariat noted, the liturgical celebration may be transferred to Saturday, Dec. 11, or Monday, Dec. 13, "in those places where the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe has very special significance."

The divine worship secretariat also offered guidance on Christmas 2010, a Saturday, and the Dec. 26 feast of the Holy Family, a Sunday.

Because Christmas has precedence in the liturgical calendar over the Holy Family feast day, "any Mass celebrated on the evening of Dec. 25 is a Mass of Christmas, not the Holy Family," the newsletter said.

In addition, "as a practical matter, the secretariat observes that pastors and other priests should not feel obliged to schedule a Mass with the people on Christmas evening, even if a Saturday evening Mass is usually on the parish schedule," it said.

"On a night when families (and many priests themselves) gather at homes for Christmas dinner, a Christmas Mass on Saturday evening would likely not be attended by many people," the secretariat added, noting also the difficulty in finding "sufficient liturgical ministers."

The weekend of Jan. 1-2, 2011, presents a conflict between the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, which falls on Jan. 1, and the solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, officially Jan. 6 but celebrated in the United States on the first Sunday in January.

In 2011, the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God is not a holy day of obligation because it falls on a Saturday, the divine worship secretariat noted.

"Although both are ranked at number 3 in the table of liturgical days, as a solemnity of the Lord, the Epiphany outranks the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God," the newsletter said. "Just as the mother of God points the way and leads us to her Son, her solemnity gives way to the Epiphany."

Therefore, the secretariat said, Masses on the evening of Jan. 1 are to be celebrated as the vigil of the Epiphany.

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