

## CREATION TIME IN THE SEASON OF PENTECOST

### The Liturgical Colour Orange and Ember Days

Although it feels as if we are introducing a new liturgical colour, we may envision Creation Time and its colour orange not as the next new flavour in public worship, but as an important recapturing of an ancient Christian liturgical way of being that we have lost—and lost at great peril.

#### History

Orange was:

- the Early Christian colour for confessors, monastics, and matrons
- worn in some Russian churches during summer fasts; in Western rites, some mainline Protestant churches propose orange as a colour for fall
- some Orthodox Churches use scarlet, orange, or rust

#### Symbolism/Psychology

- symbolic of endurance and strength
- colour of fire and flame
- the red of passion tempered by the yellow of wisdom
- colour of harvest, fruitfulness, joy
- colour of positive energy
- colour of change
- mentally stimulating
- very easy to see
- a bridge between two opposing factors: heat of summer and cool of winter
- adventurous, confident colour
- said to be the colour of excitement
- a sociable colour reflecting warmth and cheerful feelings
- nature's "last burst of life" before the dormancy of winter
- psychologists have found that showing the colour orange to people has a positive effect on hormone levels
- a colour of healthy produce that intensifies when cooked

#### Liturgy

- God comes to be seen, known, and experienced in the midst of all of creation, rather than only within human history
- Creation Time looks at our deep and rightful connection with nature, and at our wrongful domination and exploitation of it
- we reflect on our abuse of God's trust in us and pledge to reform our ways
- worship can reflect these themes as follows:
  - liturgical hangings portraying scenes from the life of St. Francis or the four elements of creation: earth, water, air, and fire; or a depiction of earth seen from space; or other cosmic elements
  - stole worn by the presiding worship leader can show a cycle of life using symbols for the stages of human or plant life, e.g., seed, plantlet, blossom, fruit, and dying plant providing the nourishment for new growth
  - prayers of confession may call us into a new relationship with nature/creation



- at the offering, a different element of nature may be brought forward each Sunday: earth, water, rock, fire, moss and grass, or a branch from a tree
- our prayers may connect our need for favourable weather and good harvests with our responsibility as stewards of the world's resources
- there is plenty of room for variation in the shades of orange: yellows, saffron, and rust hues enrich orange. Orange also blends well with the earth browns, greens, and blues of creation

Note: the architectural setting and liturgical style of the congregation need to be respected and enhanced by colour; creative use of colour should not be a distraction.

## Ember Days

### History

Ember Days were

- liturgically designated days attached to the natural seasons of summer, autumn, and winter
- in pre-Christian Rome, offerings were made to the gods and goddesses of agriculture in the hope that the deities would provide a bountiful harvest, a rich vintage, and a productive seeding
- at the beginning of the time for seeding and harvesting, religious ceremonies were performed to implore the help of the deities: in June for a bountiful harvest, in September for a rich vintage, and in December for the seeding, keeping alive the memory of the time when the month of March was the first month of the year
- to these three agricultural seasons (summer, fall, and winter), the Christian church added the celebration of the beginning of spring
- when this fourth season was added cannot be ascertained, but by the 5th century, the church spoke of all four seasons, paralleling in a fashion the Hebrew law which prescribes a "fast of the fourth month, and a fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of tenth" (Zechariah 8:19)
- originally tied to the earth and to the birth and growth of crops, by the 5th century Ember Days were also used to pray for those being ordained. Thus days of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving became not only about the earth and bodily food, but also about the church, its ministers, and ministries ensuring spiritual food
- before the church seasons were fixed, the church year consisted of Easter, Pentecost, and Ember Days
- Ember Days were established as the Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays in
  - first week of Lent
  - first week after Pentecost
  - third week of September
  - third week of Advent
- from Rome, marking Ember Days spread quickly to England, Gaul, Germany, Spain, Milan
- the Eastern Church does not know them
- in the church of the Reformation, Ember Days marked a season of piety, days of prayer and fasting to sanctify each season
- bishops were/are permitted to adapt Ember Days according to the various regions and needs of the people, to arrange the time and plan of their celebration

Today Ember Days appear in some church calendars as "days of prayer for peace" and are optional in the Anglican, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic churches.

## Etymology

- *ember* is thought by some to come from the Old English *ymbren*, possibly an alteration for *ymbryne* "period," from *ymb* "about" + *ryne* "course"
- possibly the name is derived from the Latin *quatuor tempora* "four periods or times"
- *ember* may also come from the German *Quatember*, translated "quarter day," a day of asking God's blessing on the new season

## Liturgy

- Ember Days bring the liturgical seasons and the natural seasons into more explicit or intentional alignment
- they remind us of our dependency upon God for life and blessings and of our need for thanksgiving to God
- they enable us to consider the wonder of the natural seasons and their relation to God and to consider nature, including humankind, as the very "thing" in which grace abides
- Ember Days also provide corporate opportunities for confession, intercession, and supplication as these relate to creation
- Thomas Aquinas felt the natural seasons reflected paradise itself, where there is "the beauty of spring, the brightness of summer, the plenty of autumn, the rest of winter"
- Ember Days give us the opportunity to focus on God through the lens of fire, air, water, soil, etc. seeking God's blessings upon them and acknowledging that all life comes from and will return to creation and thus from and to God
- Ember Days allow us to stand in solidarity with those who suffer from drought, fire, floods, environmental disasters, crop failure, and exploitation of the earth
- Ember Days rightly refocus us on the environment, climate change, and our responsibility for the world's resources
- Ember Days also encourage us to pray for the conversion of heart in relation to our care of the earth, the "ecological conversion" about which Pope John Paul II spoke (Pope John Paul II's General Audience Address, January 17, 2001.)

May Ember Days rightfully inform and enrich our Creation Time, giving it a context of valued holy days valuable once again to our time and place.