***So How Long Is Christmas***

***SO - HOW LONG IS CHRISTMAS?***

***Or - Did the GRINCH steal Christmas or did the culture let him in!***

I think it should not surprise us that in spite of the fact that the Christian Calendar (Kalendar) has a much longer history than the evolving, innovative Secular American Calendar, the Secular Calendar is winning. In fact, not only is it winning in the “secular world” (a redundant phrase) it is winning in Christian Churches with little sense of historicity who have eliminated the Calendar of the Church and replaced it with the “Christian Light” Calendar: Christmas (which has twelve days before December 25), Easter (which includes Good Friday), and Mother’s Day. While one might argue as to what is right or wrong, the reality is that most modern denominations and so-called “Bible Churches or “Non-denominational Churches” have eliminated virtually all Christian Feast Days. In areas where these types of churches predominate, we should not be surprised when our own people seem to be surprised to learn or remember what have been the Traditional Festivals/Feast Days of the Church. Sadly, whenever Feast Days are eliminated, and the Liturgical Seasons are eliminated, we are met with a cultureless Christianity. Unfortunately, that means that secular “holidays” have replaced religious holidays or religious holidays become secularist versions of what they were instituted to be. Religious sociologists have coined the phrase “civil religion” which in our context means that when the Church drops festivals and holy days, the culture establishes something to fill the void. I will not burden you with “Christmas Break” and “Easter Break” versus “Winter Break” and “Spring Break.”

 So...how long is Christmas? The Secular world, which has dragged some modern churches with it, seems to have Christmas begin either right before or right after Thanksgiving Day. There is no opportunity to focus on savoring the taste of the Thanksgiving meal, and enjoy family - because a new secular feast is celebrated the day after Thanksgiving, called “Black Friday.” It’s Christmas everywhere. On one hand, not unlike the birth of all children, we do spend the last month making preparations for the birth - it’s just that the expectant mother is not really up to celebrating parties that month. She is much too busy for the event - called “the birth.” Traditional Christians call that last month preparing for the Birth of the Baby Jesus - “Advent.”

 It is after the birth that friends and family come to celebrate the birth of the child. Sadly, for many who see the secular calendar as “official,” including modern churches, on the day after Christmas Day - it’s over! For traditional Christians, it has just begun, and for at least Twelve Days - it continues, with Holy Days (holidays) almost every day. Traditional Churches follow the Biblical pattern: Jesus is born, Jesus is circumcised, and named on the 8th Day (January 1), and the Wisemen (sometimes called Kings) arrive bearing their gifts on January 6 - the Feast of the Epiphany. Of course, “enlightened people” will tell us that Jesus wasn’t born on December 25 and that the Wisemen took years to complete their trek, but that type of person apparently does not understand the difference between observing important events versus writing a substantial paper regarding historicity. If one were to take that reasoning to a conclusion, then we should only celebrate Christmas every 33 years. Likewise, Good Friday and Easter - every 33 years, since most historians believe that Jesus’ birth, death and Resurrection took place within a 33-year period. It would be like saying that there is only one birthday for us - the day we were born, that every year we celebrate the anniversary of our birth and that we should NEVER celebrate that day except on the precise day at the precise time. Many people do not enjoy birthday parties at 2 A.M. but generally speaking, babies and parents do not always have a consultation before birth about the most convenient time for the mother. Moreover the “enlightened people” who are convinced that they have the inside track on Biblical Truth generally offer no alternatives for observing these Biblical Feasts at the “historically correct” time.

 So....is January 6 - or its Eve (Sundown on January 5) the last day of Christmas? Yes and No. Certainly the Twelve Days are the Traditional Days of the Christmas Season, and technically, most Traditional Christians do not take ANY decorations down until the Epiphany - but, Forty Days after Christmas Day - again followed by traditional Christians - it is the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, The Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which involves the Blessing of the Candles to be used that year in churches, as we sing the Song of Blessed Simeon, “To be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the Glory of thy people Israel.” Indeed - Epiphany proclaims by virtue of the Adoration of the Magi who are from Gentile lands, that this Messiah, awaited for by the Jews for centuries, is for ALL people - Jews and Gentiles, and on February 2, St. Simeon once again proclaims that reality. Ironically many Americans who trace their heritage from Spain or a number of Hispanic countries have a traditional Cake served on Epiphany. In the cake is placed a Nino (baby figure) and the “winner” who finds the Christ Child in his or her piece of cake must now make and serve Tamales on February 2 - yes, the Feast Day mentioned above.

 So.....how long is Christmas? Well....in one sense — all year — since every Mass that is celebrated is a “Christ” Mass. In another sense, it is Twelve days long, and in yet another sense it is 40 Days long. But by then it is time for Saint Valentine’s Day (no this saint did not shoot arrows at peoples’ hearts) and Saint Patrick’s Day (no he did not drink green beer.) But there it is, for Christians we have a choice — simply go with the flow — do what the crowd does — or claim and reclaim our heritage. After all, there is no law that mandates either (St.) Valentine’s Day or St. Patrick’s Day, so maybe it is Hallmark that determines what is and what isn’t a Feast Day? Can we take a day off from school or work because “I’m tired” but would never take a day off for Good Friday? In the end, the question is — did “they” take our Christian Calendar away or did “we” simply allow it to be taken? The same principle can apply in terms of our Faith; if attending a church on Sunday were suddenly “against the law” as it is and has been in several countries, would attendance decline in adherence to the law or would it increase because “no one is going to tell me what I can and can’t do.”

 If Christians were firmer in their Faith, much of the above would never have had to be written because all of the aforementioned observances would have continued since “it is what we always have done at all times and in all places” for over Two Thousand years.