

A Family Celebration for The Easter Triduum  
During the Covid19 Precautions of 2020

DAY ONE:  
Holy Thursday

- I: Lighting of Candles: A parent or grandparent or oldest person present, lights some candles on the table (it doesn't matter how many) and prays:

*Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.*

All respond: *Blessed be God forever.*

- II: A Reading from the Book of Exodus (12:1-8, 11-14)

*The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt,  
“This month shall stand at the head of your calendar;  
you shall reckon it the first month of the year.*

*Tell the whole community of Israel:*

*On the tenth of this month every one of your families  
must procure for itself a lamb, one apiece for each household.*

*If a family is too small for a whole lamb,  
it shall join the nearest household in procuring one  
and shall share in the lamb*

*in proportion to the number of persons who partake of it.*

*The lamb must be a year-old male and without blemish.*

*You may take it from either the sheep or the goats.*

*You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month,  
and then, with the whole assembly of Israel present,  
it shall be slaughtered during the evening twilight.*

*They shall take some of its blood  
and apply it to the two doorposts and the lintel  
of every house in which they partake of the lamb.*

*That same night they shall eat its roasted flesh  
with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.*

*“This is how you are to eat it:*

*with your loins girt, sandals on your feet and your staff in hand,*

*you shall eat like those who are in flight.  
It is the Passover of the LORD.  
For on this same night I will go through Egypt,  
striking down every firstborn of the land, both man and beast,  
and executing judgment on all the gods of Egypt—I, the LORD!  
But the blood will mark the houses where you are.  
Seeing the blood, I will pass over you;  
thus, when I strike the land of Egypt,  
no destructive blow will come upon you.  
“This day shall be a memorial feast for you,  
which all your generations shall celebrate  
with pilgrimage to the LORD, as a perpetual institution.”*

Reader: *The Word of the Lord.*

All: *Thanks be to God*

III. Gesture of Welcome

(keeping social distance as much is appropriate for the people that are gathered):

Each participant exchanges a small token or gift, which has been prepared ahead of time, showing appreciation for the others being there. It could be a prayer card or a hand written note. Families can decide what is appropriate as far as touching each other.

IV. A Reading from The First Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians (11:23-26)

*Brothers and sisters:*

*I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you,  
that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over,  
took bread, and, after he had given thanks,  
broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you.  
Do this in remembrance of me.”*

*In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying,  
“This cup is the new covenant in my blood.*

*Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”  
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,  
you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.*

Reader: *The Word of the Lord*

All: *Thanks be to God*

V. All pray the following or similar prayer:  
*Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts,  
which we are about to receive from Thy bounty, through Christ, Our Lord.  
AMEN*

VI: The meal is now served. The Menu is up to each family / group.

VII: A Reading from the Gospel of John (13: 1015):

*Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come  
to pass from this world to the Father.  
He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end.  
The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him  
over.  
So, during supper,  
fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power  
and that he had come from God and was returning to God,  
he rose from supper and took off his outer garments.  
He took a towel and tied it around his waist.  
Then he poured water into a basin  
and began to wash the disciples' feet  
and dry them with the towel around his waist.  
He came to Simon Peter, who said to him,  
"Master, are you going to wash my feet?"  
Jesus answered and said to him,  
"What I am doing, you do not understand now,  
but you will understand later."  
Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet."  
Jesus answered him,  
"Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me."  
Simon Peter said to him,  
"Master, then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well."  
Jesus said to him,  
"Whoever has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed,  
for he is clean all over;  
so you are clean, but not all."  
For he knew who would betray him;  
for this reason, he said, "Not all of you are clean."*

*So when he had washed their feet  
and put his garments back on and reclined at table again,  
he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you?  
You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am.  
If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet,  
you ought to wash one another's feet.  
I have given you a model to follow,  
so that as I have done for you, you should also do."  
Reader: *The Gospel of the Lord.*  
All: *Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

VII: All pray or sing: Where Charity and Love prevail:

Where charity and love prevail,  
there God is ever found;  
Brought here together by Christ's love,  
by love are we thus bound.

With grateful joy and holy fear  
God's charity we learn;  
Let us with heart and mind and soul  
now love God in return.

Forgive we now each other's faults  
as we our faults confess;  
And let us love each other well  
in Christian holiness.

Let strife among us be unknown,  
let all contention cease;  
Be God's the glory that we seek,  
be ours God's holy peace.

Let us recall that in our midst  
dwells God's begotten Son;  
As members of his body joined,  
we are in Christ made one.

No race or creed can love exclude,  
If honored be God's name;  
Our family embraces all  
whose Father is the same.

VIII: Act of Mutual Service

All clear the table except for the lighted candles and the dishes are washed  
by all that are able.

IX: Re-gather around the table and tell stories of good memories of past family  
meals.

X: Leonardo Da Vinci's painting of the Last Supper is world famous.  
How about taking a family selfie to post on Social Media?

DAY ONE CONTINUES

## Good Friday

- I: The Stations of the Cross: There are many versions of the Stations on EWTN and YouTube. Gather the family or other appropriate persons to watch.
- II: Hot Cross Buns. The familiar hot cross buns are sweet rolls with the sign of the cross cut into it, and they are one of several traditional European breads marked with a cross for Good Friday. According to tradition, these buns originated at St Alban's Abbey in 1361, where the monks gave them to the poor people who came there....
- III: The Three Hours. Some churches hold prayer services during the three hours of Christ's suffering on the Cross. It would be appropriate to observe a period of silence at home, for devotional reading and private prayer (e.g., no radio, television, etc.), especially between the hours of noon and 3:00PM
- IV: Act of Sacrifice  
Each member of the family might choose a particularly unpleasant job which has been put off for a long time -- like cleaning the garage or a closet, or scrubbing the bathrooms (we're sure you can think of something!-- to emphasize the dreariness appropriate to the day....
- V: Readings:  
Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Summary: Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with His stripes we are healed.

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

Summary: In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard for His godly fear. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered; and being made perfect He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.

Gospel [Passion] according to John (18:1 - 19:42)

Two times during Holy Week the Passion is read -- on Passion Sunday (Synoptics) and Good Friday (John). By very ancient tradition, three clergy or lay people read the three principal parts from the sanctuary: Jesus, Narrator, and all the other individual parts. Divide the Passion Narrative among three readers in the family or group.

VI: The Universal Prayers

These intercessions are the ancient prototype of the General Intercessions of our Mass today. Prayer is offered for The Church, leaders of the church and world, the faithful, catechumens, Jewish people, non-Christians and all who seek the truth.

VII: The Veneration of the Cross

In the symbol of the Cross we can see the magnitude of the human tragedy, the ravages of original sin, and the infinite love of God.

Looking at the Cross in prayer helps us truly to see it.

Most Christians have crosses in the home. Today it is more appropriate to find a rather significantly large wood cross or make one out of tree branches. The focus should be on the cross itself and not a figure of Christ nailed to it.

It is fitting that Christians glorify the Cross as a sign of Christ's resurrection and victory over sin and death, of course. But we should remember each time we see a cross that the Cross of Jesus' crucifixion was an emblem of physical anguish and personal defilement, not triumph--of debasement and humiliation, not glory--of degradation and shame, not beauty. It was a means of execution, like a gallows or a gas chamber. What the Son of God endured for us was the depth of ugliness and humiliation. We need to be reminded of the tremendous personal cost of love.

On Good Friday we contemplate the redeeming Mystery of the Cross which aids the Church in her pursuit of the renewal of the faithful...

Give children a new cross on a chain or a rosary with a crucifix. If it has not been blessed by a priest, ask a blessing over these items as a family.

VII: The Reproaches

The Reproaches (*Improperia*), are often chanted by a priest during the Good Friday service as the people are venerating the Cross. In this haunting and poignant poem-like chant of very ancient origin, Christ himself "reproaches" us, making us more deeply aware of how our sinfulness and hardness of heart caused such agony for our sinless and loving Savior.

Let all together pray this modern translation of the some of the Reproaches, originally in Latin:

*Oh, My people, What have I done to you?  
How have I offended you? Answer me!  
I led you out of Egypt; but you led your Savior to the Cross.  
For forty years I led you safely through the desert,  
I fed you with manna from heaven,  
and brought you to the land of plenty; But you led your Savior to the Cross.*

*O, My people! What have I done to you that you should testify against me?*

Pray also from the Greek Liturgy:

Holy God. Holy God. Holy Mighty One.  
Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us.

Sing or pray the familiar hymn: Where you there?

1. Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.  
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

2. *Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?*  
*Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?*  
*Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.*  
*Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?*



3. *Were you there when they pierced him in the side?  
Were you there when they pierced him in the side?  
Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.  
Were you there when they pierced him in the side?*

4. *Were you there when the sun refused to shine?  
Were you there when the sun refused to shine?  
Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.  
Were you there when the sun refused to shine?*

5. *Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?  
Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?  
Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.  
Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?*

## ***END OF DAY ONE AND BEGINNING OF DAY TWO***

### **HOLY SATURDAY**

Holy Saturday (in Latin, *Sabbatum Sanctum* ), the 'day of the entombed Christ,' is the Lord's day of rest, for on that day Christ's body lay in His tomb. We recall the Apostle's Creed which says "He descended into hell (*unto the dead*)."

It is a day of suspense between two worlds, that of darkness, sin and death, and that of the Resurrection and the restoration of the Light of the World. For this reason no liturgies are held until the Easter Vigil at night....

Ideally, Holy Saturday should be the quietest day of the year (although this is not so easy in a busy household with children as it might be in a monastery.)

Read this beautiful sermon from the middle ages:

(Tune in to the video of the Ancient Homily for Holy Saturday.)

Something strange is happening – there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear.

He has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve, he who is both God and the son of Eve. The Lord approached them bearing the cross, the weapon that had won him the victory. At the sight of him, Adam, the first man he had created, struck his breast in terror and cried out to everyone: "My Lord be with you all." Christ answered him: "And with your spirit." He took him by the hand and raised him up, saying:

"Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light. "I am your God, who for your sake have become your son. Out of love for you and for your descendants I now by my own authority command all who are held in bondage to come forth, all who are in darkness to be enlightened, all who are sleeping to arise.

"I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be held a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in my image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I am in you; together we form only one person and we cannot be separated. For your sake I, your God, became your son; I, the Lord, took the form of a slave; I, whose home is above the heavens, descended to the earth and beneath the earth.

"For your sake, for the sake of man, I became like a man without help, free among the dead. For the sake of you, who left a garden, I was betrayed to the Jews in a garden, and I was crucified in a garden.

"See on my face the spittle I received in order to restore to you the life I once breathed into you. See there the marks of the blows I received in order to refashion your warped nature in my image. On my back see the marks of the scourging I endured to remove the burden of sin that weighs upon your back. See my hands, nailed firmly to a tree, for you who once wickedly stretched out your hand to a tree.

"I slept on the cross and a sword pierced my side for you who slept in paradise and brought forth Eve from your side. My side has healed the pain in yours. My sleep will rouse you from your sleep in hell. The sword that pierced me has sheathed the sword that was turned against you.

"Rise, let us leave this place. The enemy led you out of the earthly paradise. I will not restore you to that paradise, but I will enthrone you in heaven. I forbade you the tree that was only a symbol of life, but see, I who am life

itself am now one with you. I appointed cherubim to guard you as slaves are guarded, but now I make them worship you as God.

“The throne formed by cherubim awaits you, its bearers swift and eager. The bridal chamber is adorned, the banquet is ready, the eternal dwelling places are prepared, the treasure houses of all good things lie open. The kingdom of heaven has been prepared for you from all eternity.”

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During the day, the preparations at home which must be made for Easter Day are appropriate, however, because they keep our attention fixed on the holiness and importance of the most central feast of the Church. Working with children to prepare for Easter can offer us many 'teaching moments', as well.

## DAY THREE BEGINS

### A Family Easter

#### I: A Family Easter Candle

If there is good weather, gather around your family after dark outside by a fire pit or even a grill and light a fire. Take a good size candle (of any shape) and carve or paint the numbers 2020 on it. This will be your Easter / Paschal Easter Candle then read this adapted version of the Easter Proclamation:

Exult, let them exult, the hosts of heaven,  
exult, let Angel ministers of God exult,  
let the trumpet of salvation  
sound aloud our mighty King's triumph!

Be glad, let earth be glad, as glory floods her,  
ablaze with light from her eternal King,  
let all corners of the earth be glad,  
knowing an end to gloom and darkness.

Rejoice, let Mother Church also rejoice,  
arrayed with the lightning of his glory

It is truly right and just, with ardent love of mind and heart  
and with devoted service of our voice,  
to acclaim our God invisible, the almighty Father,  
and Jesus Christ, our Lord, his Son, his Only Begotten.

Who for our sake paid Adam's debt to the eternal Father,  
and, pouring out his own dear Blood,  
wiped clean the record of our ancient sinfulness.

These, then, are the feasts of Passover,  
in which is slain the Lamb, the one true Lamb,  
whose Blood anoints the doorposts of believers.

This is the night,  
when once you led our forebears, Israel's children,  
from slavery in Egypt  
and made them pass dry-shod through the Red Sea.

This is the night  
that with a pillar of fire  
banished the darkness of sin.

This is the night  
that even now, throughout the world,  
sets Christian believers apart from worldly vices  
and from the gloom of sin,  
leading them to grace  
and joining them to his holy ones.

This is the night,  
when Christ broke the prison-bars of death  
and rose victorious from the underworld.  
Our birth would have been no gain,  
had we not been redeemed.

O wonder of your humble care for us!  
O love, O charity beyond all telling,  
to ransom a slave you gave away your Son!  
O truly necessary sin of Adam,  
destroyed completely by the Death of Christ!

O happy fault that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!  
O truly blessed night,  
worthy alone to know the time and hour  
when Christ rose from the underworld!

This is the night  
of which it is written:  
The night shall be as bright as day,  
dazzling is the night for me,  
and full of gladness.

The sanctifying power of this night  
dispels wickedness, washes faults away,  
restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to mourners,  
drives out hatred, fosters concord, and brings down the mighty.

On this, your night of grace, O holy Father,  
accept this candle, a solemn offering,  
the work of bees and of your servants' hands,  
an evening sacrifice of praise,  
this gift from your most holy Church.

But now we know the praises of this pillar,  
which glowing fire ignites for God's honor,  
a fire into many flames divided,  
yet never dimmed by sharing of its light,  
for it is fed by melting wax,  
drawn out by mother bees  
to build a torch so precious.

O truly blessed night,  
when things of heaven are wed to those of earth,  
and divine to the human.

Therefore, O Lord,  
we pray you that this candle,  
hallowed to the honor of your name,  
may persevere undimmed,  
to overcome the darkness of this night.

Receive it as a pleasing fragrance,  
and let it mingle with the lights of heaven.

May this flame be found still burning  
by the Morning Star:  
the one Morning Star who never sets,  
Christ your Son,  
who, coming back from death's domain,  
has shed his peaceful light on humanity,  
and lives and reigns for ever and ever.

**R.** Amen.

II: Read as many of the Easter Vigil Readings as is fitting for your family or group:

GN 1:1—2:2 (CREATION)

GN 22:1-18 (ABRAHAM AND ISAAC)

EX 14:15—15:1(THE ESCAPE FROM EGYPT)

IS 54:5-14(THE MARRIAGE COVENANT WITH THE LORD)

IS 55:1-11(COME TO THE WATER)

BAR 3:9-15, 32--4:4 (WALK BY THE LIGHT)

EZ 36:16-17A, 18-28 (CLEANSING AND A NEW HEART)

Reading for Mass: ROM 6:3-11 (BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST)

Gospel for Mass: MT 28:1-10 (THEN GO QUICKLY AND TELL HIS DISCIPLES ‘HE HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD!’)

III: Blessing of water and Renewal of Baptismal Promises as a Family

Prepare a container of water and call down God’s blessing on the water in these or similar words:

*Lord God almighty, hear the prayers of your people: we celebrate our creation and redemption. Hear our prayers and bless + this water which gives fruitfulness to the fields, and refreshment and cleansing to man. You chose water to show your goodness when you led your people to freedom through the Red Sea and satisfied their thirst in the desert with water from the rock. Water was the symbol used by the prophets to foretell your new covenant with man. You made the water of baptism holy by Christ’s baptism in the Jordan: by it you give us a new birth and renew us in holiness. May this water remind us of our baptism, and let us share the joy of all who are baptized this Easter. We ask this through Christ our Lord.*

It has been the custom for many generations that at Baptism we are given a candle to be kept burning brightly until the Lord’s return. Try to find everyone’s candle and light them from your Easter/Paschal Candle.

Then renew your promises and profess your faith in these words:

*I reject Satan and all his works and empty promises.*

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth*

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting*

The leader then prays:

*God, the all-powerful Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has given us a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and forgiven all our sins. May he also keep us faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ for ever and ever.*

R. Amen.

Then every baptized person touches the water and makes the sign of the Cross.

Share some good food and drink with perhaps a Lamb Cake that you can design on your own.

#### IV: Mass during the day:

Mass on Easter Day is the most splendid and exuberant celebration of the Church. For this is the Sunday of Sundays, the day of Resurrection of Christ, the center and foundation of our faith. As St. Paul said, "If Christ be not risen, your faith is vain." [I Cor. 15:14, 17] Thus Easter is the pinnacle of all feasts of the Church year -- which began with Advent, or the expectation of the coming of the Messiah, sent by God to provide the means for our Salvation. The culmination of the entire liturgy is the Easter feast. Families who attend Mass on Easter Day (This year via live streaming or another online source) join millions of Christians all over the world--past and present--in joyous affirmation of our redemption through the love of Christ, our hope of salvation, and our faith in the resurrection from the dead and the life of the world to come.

Reading 1ACTS 10:34A, 37-43

Reading 2COL 3:1-4



Sequence: Victimae Paschali Laudes

*Christians, to the Paschal Victim  
Offer your thankful praises!  
A Lamb the sheep redeems;  
Christ, who only is sinless,  
reconciles sinners to the Father.  
Death and life have contended in that combat stupendous:  
The Prince of life, who died, reigns immortal.  
Speak, Mary, declaring  
What you saw, wayfaring.  
“The tomb of Christ, who is living,  
The glory of Jesus’ resurrection;  
bright angels attesting,  
The shroud and napkin resting.  
Yes, Christ my hope is arisen;  
to Galilee he goes before you.”  
Christ indeed from death is risen, our new life obtaining.  
Have mercy, victor King, ever reigning!  
Amen. Alleluia.*

Gospel: JN 20:1-9

### Easter Day and Easter Season

Χριστός ἀνέστη! (Christos Aneste) Christ is risen!  
Ἀληθώς ἀνέστη! (Alethos Aneste) He is truly risen!

With these joyous words Christians have greeted one another on Easter Day for nearly two thousand years. And every Easter the words proclaim anew the faith and hope of every Christian in the Good News of God's profound love of mankind--a love which conquers death. This Easter greeting is still used in Church, and in the Eastern Rite Catholic Churches this proclamation is made during the Easter service as each person kisses the Gospel book.

Whenever Christians greet one another with these exultant phrases we affirm the unity of believers throughout all times and ages until He comes again in glory. Every Christian family can establish the custom of exchanging this historic greeting, which is also a profession of faith, on Easter morning. It would set an appropriate tone of rejoicing for the entire day (and a reminder,

also, for young children who may be so excited about their Easter baskets that they tend to forget why we are celebrating.)

### Alleluia

Every element of the festive celebration of Mass on Easter Day resounds with the great Alleluia -- the triumphant word of praise for God of men and angels.

Alleluia (or hallelujah) is a Hebrew word adopted by the Christian Church. (Another familiar Hebrew word is amen, 'so be it.') Hallel is the greatest expression of praise in Hebrew. Combined with Jah, the shortened form of the name of God, JHVH (יהוה) (meaning "I AM"), it becomes Hallelujah. Alleluia is a Latinized spelling.

From the time of the apostles the proclaiming of the Alleluia was a revered custom in ordinary life as well as in connection with the liturgy of the Church. Farmers and tradesmen sang it as they worked, and mothers taught their children to pronounce it before any other word. According to Father Francis Weiser, "in the Roman Empire the Alleluia became the favorite prayerful song of oarsmen and navigators. The Roman poet-Bishop Sidonius Apollinaris (480) described how the river banks and shores of Gaul resounded with the Alleluia song of the rowing boatmen." [Weiser, pp. 28-29] ('Alleluia' fits the familiar tune of the Song of the Volga Boatman. Try it!)

### The Lord's Day

Every Sunday is a celebration of the Day of the Lord's Resurrection. Every celebration of Mass commemorates all the Easter Mysteries, the Lord's Supper at which Christ instituted the Eucharist, the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross and His Resurrection, the historic events on which Christianity is based. And each Sunday celebrates the Descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (fifty days after Easter) which established the Church.

Every Sunday, then, is a "little Easter." Every Sunday is Christ's feast day. This is why the Sundays during Lent are excluded from the forty days of penance; why no saints' feast days on the Church's calendar are celebrated on Sunday; and, likewise, why no funeral Masses may be conducted on the

Lord's Day. And that is why all Catholics are seriously obliged to participate in the Church's celebration of Mass on Sundays....

### Ideas for Family Easter Celebrations

Everything we have done as a family during the forty days of Lent has led us to this day. It is time for rejoicing! It is appropriate to bring out the best of everything for the feast of Easter Day: flowers, china, the works. If you can, though, have food that doesn't take a lot of last minute preparation, so that instead of fretting too much in the kitchen, like Martha, you have time to rejoice with Jesus, like Mary.

Easter baskets and Easter egg hunts and lawn rolls are surely a universal occupation of American children on Easter morning -- along with chocolate eggs and bunnies and marshmallow peeps-- and jelly beans and green Easter grass all over the carpet -- and keeping the dog and the baby out of the chocolate! Nearly every family has its own special customs and traditional foods for Easter....

In addition to the requisite excess of candy eggs, we hope you've included in the basket something a little more lasting, like the inexpensive little books of Bible stories for the younger children; perhaps a medal or picture or a biography of a child's patron saint; even a tape of religious music would be welcomed by some older children.

Make an Easter cake in the shape of a lamb or decorate it with a lamb image.

Another cake idea (simpler but pretty) is to make cupcakes, decorate them with green colored frosting sprinkled with green shredded coconut "grass" (just add a few drops of green food color to a tablespoon or so of water, then stir in the coconut until it is nicely dyed.) With few jelly beans (or, even better, one or two coated chocolate "bird eggs") on the top, each little cake will become a colorful Easter egg nest....

You can get dozens of holiday ideas from household magazines and the food section of newspapers. The main difference in the celebration and festivities in a Christian household is that we know what we're celebrating--and why!

## Octave of Easter and Paschal Tide

The celebration of the feast of Easter, like that of all great feasts of the Church, continues for eight days, or an octave. During the week following Easter Sunday various post-resurrection appearances of Christ are celebrated in the liturgy....The Octave ends on the first Sunday after Easter, which is known as Low Sunday. This name is apparently intended to convey the contrast between this day and the great Easter festival which preceded it, as well as to indicate that, as the Octave Day, it is part of the Easter feast but in a lower degree. This Sunday is also known as "*Dominica in albis depositis*," in reference to the fact that those who had been baptized at the Easter Vigil laid aside their white baptismal robes for the first time on this day.

The time from the end of the Octave of Easter to the day after Pentecost is called Paschal Tide. The two great feasts celebrated during this time are Ascension and Pentecost.

## “A Rite of Passage”

I have always rather liked the gruff robustness of the first rubric for baptism found in a late fourth-century church order which directs that the bishop enter the vestibule of the baptistery and say to the catechumens without commentary or apology only four words: “Take off your clothes.”

There is no evidence that the assistants fainted or the catechumens asked what he meant. Catechesis and much prayer and fasting had led them to understand that the language of their passage this night in Christ from death to life would be the language of the bathhouse and the tomb—not that of the forum and the drawing room.

So they stripped and stood there, probably, faint from fasting, shivering from the cold of early Easter morning and with awe at what was about to transpire. Years of formation were about to be consummated; years of having their motives and lives scrutinized; years of hearing the word of God read and expounded at worship; years of being dismissed with prayer before the Faithful went on to celebrate the Eucharist; years of having the doors to the assembly hall closed to them; years of seeing the tomb-like baptistery building only from without; years of hearing the old folks of the community tell hair-raising tales of what being a Christian had cost their own grandparents when the emperors were still pagan; years of running into a reticent and reverent vagueness concerning what was actually done by the Faithful at the breaking of bread and in that closed baptistery. . . . Tonight all this was about to end as they stood here naked on a cold floor in the gloom of this eerie room.

Abruptly the bishop demands that they face westward, toward where the sun dies swallowed up in darkness, and denounce the King of shadows and death and things that go bump in the night. Each one of them comes forward to do this loudly under the hooded gaze of the bishop (who is tired from presiding all night at the vigil continuing next door in the church), as deacons shield the nudity of the male catechumens from the women, and deaconesses screen the women in the same manner. This is when each of them finally lets go of the world and of life as they have known it: the umbilical cord is cut, but they have not yet begun to breathe.

Then they must each turn eastwards toward where the sun surges up bathed in a light which just now can be seen stealing into the alabaster windows of the room. They must voice their acceptance of the King of light and life who has trampled down death by his own death. As each one finishes this he or she is fallen upon by a deacon or a deaconess who vigorously rubs olive oil into his or her body, as the bishop perhaps dozes off briefly, leaning on his cane. (He is like an old surgeon waiting for the operation to begin.) When all the catechumens have been thoroughly oiled, they and the bishop are suddenly startled by the crash of the baptistery doors being thrown open. Brilliant golden light spills out into the shadowy vestibule, and following the bishop (who has now regained his composure) the catechumens and the assistant presbyters, deacons, deaconesses, and sponsors move into the most glorious room most of them have ever seen. It is a high, arbor-like pavilion of green, gold, purple, and white mosaic from marble floor to domed ceiling sparkling like jewels in the light of innumerable oil lamps that fill the room with a heady warmth. The windows are beginning to blaze with the light of Easter dawn. The walls curl with vines and tendrils that thrust up from the floor, and at their tops apostles gaze down robed in snow-white togas, holding crowns. They stand around a golden chair draped with purple upon which rests only an open book. And above all these, in the highest point of the ballooning dome, a naked Jesus (very much in the flesh) stands up to his waist in the Jordan as an unkempt John pours water on him and God's disembodied hand points the Holy Spirit at Jesus' head in the form of a white bird.

Suddenly the catechumens realize that they have unconsciously formed themselves into a mirror-image of this lofty icon on the floor directly beneath it. They are standing around a pool let into the middle of the floor, into which gushes water pouring noisily from the mouth of a stone lion crouching atop a pillar at poolside. The bishop stands beside this, his presbyters on each side: a deacon has entered the pool, and the other assistants are trying to maintain a modicum of decorum among the catechumens who forget their nakedness as they crowd close to see.

The room is warm, humid, and it glows. It is a golden paradise in a bathhouse in a mausoleum: an oasis, Eden restored: the navel of the world, where death and life meet, copulate, and become undistinguishable from each other. Jonah peers out from a niche, Noah from another, Moses from a third, and the paralytic carrying his stretcher from a fourth. The windows begin to sweat. The bishop rumbles a massive prayer—something about the

Spirit and the waters of life and death—and then pokes the water a few times with his cane. The catechumens recall Moses doing something like that to a rock from which water flowed, and they are mightily impressed. Then a young male catechumen of about ten, the son of pious parents, is led down into the pool by the deacon. The water is warm (it has been heated in a furnace), and the oil on his body spreads out on the surface in iridescent swirls. The deacon positions the child near the cascade from the lion's mouth.

The bishop leans over on his cane, and in a voice that sounds like something out of the Apocalypse, says: "Euphemius! Do you believe in God the Father, who created all of heaven and earth?" After a nudge from the deacon beside him, the boy murmurs that he does. And just in time, for the deacon, who has been doing this for fifty years and is the boy's grandfather, wraps him in his arms, lifts him backwards into the rushing water and forces him under the surface. The old deacon smiles through his beard at the wide brown eyes that look up at him in shock and fear from beneath the water (the boy has purposely not been told what to expect). Then he raises him up coughing and sputtering.

The bishop waits until he can speak again, and leaning over a second time, tapping the boy on the shoulder with his cane, says: "Euphemius! Do you believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, who was conceived of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, and was crucified, died, and was buried? Who rose on the third day and ascended into heaven, from whence he will come again to judge the living and the dead?" This time he replies like a shot, "I do," and then holds his nose. . . .

"Euphemius! Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the master and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who is to be honored and glorified equally with the Father and the Son, who spoke by the Prophets? And in one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church which is the communion of God's holy ones? And in the life that is coming?" "I do." When he comes up the third time, his vast grandfather gathers him in his arms and carries him up the steps leading out of the pool. There another deacon roughly dries Euphemius with a warm towel, and a senior presbyter, who is almost ninety and is regarded by all as a "confessor" because he was imprisoned for the faith as a young man, tremulously pours perfumed oil from a glass pitcher over the boy's damp head until it soaks his hair and runs down over his upper body. The

fragrance of this enormously expensive oil fills the room as the old man mutters: “God’s servant, Euphemius, is anointed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

Euphemius is then wrapped in a new linen tunic; the fragrant chrism seeps into it, and he is given a burning terracotta oil lamp and told to go stand by the door and keep quiet.

Meanwhile, the other baptisms have continued.

When all have been done in this same manner (an old deaconess, a widow, replaced Euphemius’s grandfather when it came the women’s time), the clergy strike up the Easter hymn, “Christ is risen from the dead, he has crushed death by his death and bestowed life on those who lay in the tomb.” To this constantly repeated melody interspersed with the Psalm verse, “Let God arise and smite his enemies,” the whole baptismal party—tired, damp, thrilled, and oily—walk out into the blaze of Easter morning and go next door to the church led by the bishop.

There he bangs on the closed doors with his cane: they are flung open, the endless vigil is halted, and the baptismal party enters as all take up the hymn, “Christ is risen . . . ,” which is all but drowned out by the ovations that greet Christ truly risen in his newly born ones. As they enter, the fragrance of chrism fills the church: it is the Easter smell, God’s grace olfactorally incarnate. The pious struggle to get near the newly baptized to touch their chrismed hair and rub its fragrance on their own faces. All is chaos until the baptismal party manages to reach the towering ambo that stands in the middle of the pewless hall. The bishop ascends its lower front steps, turns to face the white-clad neophytes grouped at the bottom with their burning lamps and the boisterous faithful now held back by a phalanx of well-built acolytes and doorkeepers. Euphemius’s mother has fainted and been carried outside for some air.

The bishop opens his arms to the neophytes and once again all burst into “Christ is risen,” *Christos aneste*. . . . He then affirms and seals their baptism after prayer, for all the Faithful to see, with an authoritative gesture of paternity—laying his hand on each head, signing each oily forehead once again in the form of a cross, while booming out: “The servant of God is sealed with the Holy Spirit.” To which all reply in a thunderous “Amen,” and for the first time the former catechumens receive and give the kiss of peace. Everyone is in tears.



While this continues, bread and wine are laid out on the holy table; the bishop then prays at great length over them after things quiet down, and the neophytes lead all to communion with Euphemius out in front. While his grandfather holds his lamp, Euphemius dines on the precious Body whose true and undoubted member he has become; drinks the precious Blood of him in whom he himself has now died; and just this once drinks from two other special cups—one containing baptismal water, the other containing milk and honey mixed as a gustatory icon of the promised land into which he and his colleagues have finally entered out of the desert through Jordan's waters. Then his mother (now recovered and somewhat pale, still insisting she had only stumbled) took him home and put him, fragrantly, to bed. Euphemius had come a long way. He had passed from death into a life he lives still.