

WHAT WE CELEBRATE IN THE EASTER SEASON

EASTER CHRIST IS RISEN, ALLELUIA!

The word "Easter" comes from Old English, meaning simply the "East." The sun which rises in the East, bringing light, warmth, and hope, is a symbol for the Christian of the rising Christ, who is the true Light of the world. **The Paschal Candle** used during the Easter Vigil is a central symbol of this divine light, which is Christ. It is kept near the ambo throughout Easter Time and lit for all liturgical celebrations.

The season of Easter is the most important of all liturgical times, which Catholics celebrate as the Lord's resurrection from the dead, culminating in his Ascension to the Father and sending of the Holy Spirit upon the Church. The Easter festival is an extended event. There are 50 days of Easter from the first Sunday (Easter Sunday) to Pentecost which are kept as one great feast day called the Great Sunday. These are days of joyous reflection on the resurrection. It is characterized, above all, by the joy of glorified life and the victory over death expressed most fully in the great resounding cry of the Christian: Alleluia! All faith flows from faith in the resurrection: "If Christ has not been raised, then empty is our preaching; empty, too, is your faith." (1 Cor 15:14)

Throughout the 50 days of the Easter season, we are invited to celebrate the reality of new creation in our own lives, our re-creation as the children of God, having moved through Baptism from death to new life in Christ.

- Easter comes in the midst of spring. How can the new life rising out of the earth—green shoots and crocuses, lilies, and daffodils—inspire us to prayer? What newness is springing forth in your soul?
- The Risen Christ bears in his resurrected body the scars of his crucifixion (John 20:27). We too may bear the scars of our former life of sin and death. We can ask the Lord in prayer to show us how he might use our scars to lead others to share in our trust that our God can make all things new.

St. Paul in 2 Corinthians implores us to look ahead: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (5:17). That is God's Easter promise to us!

- How do you best experience a sense of praise and gratitude toward God? To keep a gratitude journal? What is one practice you could continue or add to your life of prayer that celebrates the truth that God is renewing creation in you?

ASPECTS OF THE EASTER SEASON

Alleluia! Alleluia is the song of the Easter season. It is a shout of joy and means "praise to God!" With Christ and all his Church, we rejoice that God has raised him up from death and has given us a share in his unending life

Easter vigil: During Holy Saturday night, the Church celebrates the victory of Christ over sin and death. He is the light of the world, who frees us from the kingdom of darkness and brings us into his kingdom of love.

- *Initiation.* On Easter night, catechumens profess their faith and are plunged into the baptismal waters; confirmed with fragrant holy Chrism, they are welcomed to the Lord's table, where they are nourished with the bread of life and the cup of salvation.
- *Renewal.* Other members of the Church profess their faith once more, renewing their baptismal promises to die with Christ to sin, and to live with him for God.

Easter Sunday is the greatest day of the Christian year. We praise God for all God's wonderful works of creation and salvation, but especially for raising Jesus from the dead, and declaring Jesus Lord. Jesus is the saviour, the centre of salvation history.

We rejoice today with all Christians, for our heavenly Father has made us sharers in the grace of his Son. By baptism we die with him, are buried with him in death and are raised with him to glory. We share in his victory and his abundant new life.

Easter octave: During this week, we continue our rejoicing over the resurrection of our Lord and his victory over sin and death. The daily gospel readings this week describe occasions on which the risen Jesus appeared to his followers.

Second Sunday of Easter: The gospel presents Thomas as he comes to believe in the risen Lord. We who did not see Christ in the flesh are called blessed also, because he has given us the faith to believe in him.

Easter season: Fifty days of Easter joy will bring us to the feast of Pentecost. God's gift of life is complete in the sending of the Holy Spirit.

Easter water: Water is blessed during the vigil for use in baptisms during the Easter season. This water is sprinkled over the people present at the vigil and on Easter Sunday as they renew their baptismal promises. We use blessed water in our homes as a reminder of our baptism, by which Jesus makes us the holy people of God. **The sprinkling rite:** This rite, with water blessed at the vigil, is often used at the beginning of Sunday masses

Acts of the Apostles: This is read at all celebrations in place of the Old Testament which, by ancient tradition, is not read during the season. The reading of Acts presents the life, growth and witness of the early church.

Initiation: Confirmation and First Eucharist find their proper place for celebration during the easter season, especially at a parish Sunday Eucharist.

THE ASCENSION

The Paschal Mystery culminates in the Ascension of Jesus. After his appearance here on earth in his risen body, and "after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen" (Acts 1:2), Jesus "was lifted up and a cloud took him from their sight" (Acts 1:9):

Christ's ascension marks the definitive entrance of Jesus' humanity into God's heavenly domain, whence he will come again (cf. Acts 1:11) Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, precedes us into the Father's glorious kingdom so that we, the members of his Body, may

live in the hope of one day being with him forever. Jesus Christ, having entered the sanctuary of heaven once and for all, intercedes constantly for us as the mediator who assures us of the permanent outpouring of the Holy Spirit. (CCC, nos. 665-667

- *One celebration.* Throughout the Easter season, we praise God our Father for making Jesus Lord of creation and seating him at his right hand. On Ascension Day, we honour our Lord who has led the way through death to God.
- *Seated in glory.* Jesus our King is seated at the right hand of his Father. He offers the praise and prayers of the Church in heaven and on earth to our Father. Our songs of praise are joined with his, and he offers us along with his own total self giving to God.
- *Days of prayer.* We celebrate the glory of our Lord and to pray for his people on earth. In the days between the Ascension and Pentecost, we ask Jesus to send his Spirit on his Church, in order to renew his generous gifts and to call his people to be ever more faithful to his commandment of love.

PENTECOST

Pentecost marks the occasion of God sending the Holy Spirit upon Jesus' disciples after his Resurrection. The book of Acts describes how the disciples were gathered together in one place on the day of Pentecost. The day of Pentecost was a turning point for the disciples:

Before Pentecost, the disciples were unsure of what they were to do next and spent most of their time in hiding. After Pentecost and receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit, they understood their mission to spread the Good News of Jesus, and they had the courage to come out of hiding and speak openly about who Jesus was and what he had accomplished by his dying and rising.

On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit gave the disciples the strength to fulfill their commission to spread the Good News of Jesus. The Church marks this day through a special liturgical celebration. The Solemnity of Pentecost, which crowns and fulfills the Easter season, is a good time to pray for a deeper indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

- *Sending of the Spirit:* On this fiftieth and final day of the Easter season, we rejoice in being members of God's holy people, with the privilege and responsibility of joining Christ and his Church in worshipping God. We thank the Father for letting his Spirit live within us to guide our lives and our prayer. The Spirit is Jesus' first gift to all who believe.
- *End of the season:* On Pentecost evening the Easter season ends. The Paschal candle is extinguished and moved to its permanent location near the baptismal font. During the year, it will be lighted whenever we celebrate baptisms or funerals: when new members are welcomed into the Church of God and when members follow Jesus back to God.