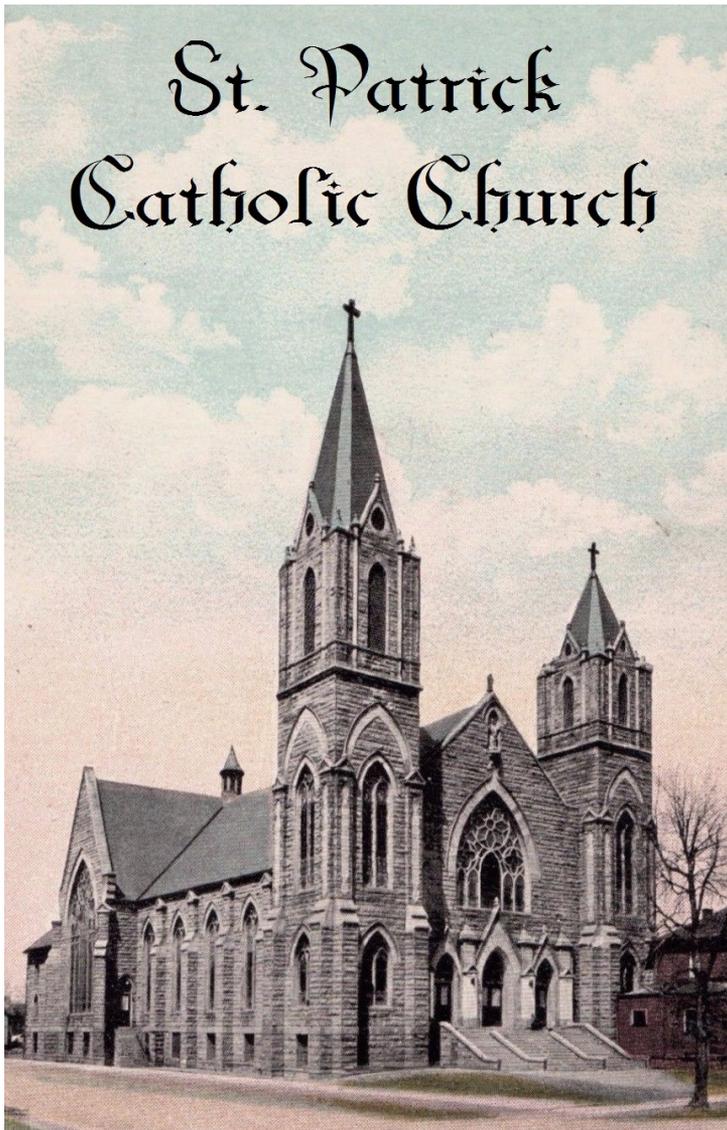


St. Patrick
Catholic Church



Blessing of Easter Baskets

Holy Saturday, March 31, 2018 @ 1:30 PM

The Easter basket is a Christian Tradition

The precise origin of coloring eggs is not known, but it can be traced back to early Greek Christians who colored their eggs red to symbolize the blood of the sacrificed Christ. They also used green in honor of the new foliage emerging after the long "dead" time of winter.

From the time of the early Christians, the traditional Easter basket took its deepest roots in Eastern Europe where it included foods that were rich in symbolism. The basket included those foods which Catholics abstained from during Lent such as meat, eggs and butter. To this day, the tradition of preparing, blessing, and eating from the basket on Easter Sunday morning flourishes throughout the Catholic Faith.

In the early 1700's, German immigrant families introduced the tradition of the Easter basket to North America. German Protestants wanted to retain the Catholic custom of eating colored eggs for Easter, but did not want to introduce their children to the Catholic rite of fasting. Eggs were forbidden to Catholics during the fast of Lent, which was a reason for the abundance of eggs at Easter time. Over time, other colors, including the pastels popular in the United States and elsewhere (possibly symbolizing the rainbow, another seasonal sign of luck and hope) evolved. By the 1800's candy was commonly added to the baskets.

The following is a guide that can be used in the preparation of your family's Easter basket. It is common to substitute some of the Eastern European foods with regard to family's ethnicity. If this is your family's first Easter basket, you'll be quite surprised at what a cherished tradition this will become for future generations.

What is contained in a traditional Easter Basket?

PASCHA/KULICH

A sweet, yeast bread rich in eggs, butter and other condiments such as nuts and raisins. It is symbolic of Christ Himself, who is our True Bread. Usually it is baked as a round loaf baked with a golden crust decorated with some symbol indicative of Christ, such as a braided cross, a lamb or something like that. Sometimes a cross of dough is placed on top, and the entire loaf rimmed with a braided plait of dough giving it a crowned effect. Sometimes the abbreviations (in Greek or in Cyrillic - XB does NOT equal "ex bee" but "cha vuh," the initials for "Christos Voskres!" - "Christ is Risen!" much as IHS does NOT stand for "I Have Suffered" or some other "Latin" expression, but is the GREEK abbreviation for the name of "Jesus," "IHSOUS" [with the S being represented by Greek Sigma]."

EGGS

Decorated eggs, some with religious symbols and markings, are indicative of new life and of resurrection.

CHEESE

A custard-type cheese shaped into a ball which has a rather bland but sweet taste, and is intended to be indicative of the moderation that Christians should have in all things. Also, creamed cheese is sometimes placed in a small dish and decorated with initials or patterns by placing peppercorns or cloves in appropriate patterns.

HAM

The flesh meat popular among Slavs as the main dish for several reasons: a) the richness of its meat which is symbolic of the great joy and abundance of Easter and b) of the richness of the joy in Christ we ought to have, and c) our freedom from the Old Law, now that all things have been "made clean in Christ" (as indicated to Peter in the dream on the rooftop at Joppa). Being freed from the Old Law and from the death which is the wage of sin, all things are now permissible to eat - and ham, the most forbidden of all the "unclean" foods is now symbolic of our TOTAL redemption. Many will include meats like roasted veal, roast beef and other foods prepared well ahead of time - foods which can be enjoyed without a lot of last-minute preparation. Those who have been preparing all week are already exhausted, and looking forward to sitting down and doing nothing for a few hours.

BUTTER

Usually the butter is shaped into a figure of a Lamb or of a three-barred cross and decorated in much the same fashion as the cheese. Butter is to remind us of the goodness of Christ that we ought to be demonstrating to all men by our lives in Him.

SAUSAGE ("Kohl-ba'-ssi")

A spicy, garlicky sausage of pork, veal, beef and other products. Indicative of God's favor and generosity.

BACON

A piece of uncooked bacon cured with spices. Symbolic of the lavishness, the overabundance of God's mercy toward us.

SALT

A condiment necessary for flavor reminding Christians of our duties toward others to "flavor" the world.

HORSERADISH

Horseradish mixed with grated red beets. Symbolic of the Passion of Christ which is still in our minds, but which is sweetened with some sugar because of the Resurrection. A bitter-sweet red-colored mixture which reminds us of the Blood and suffering of Christ, at which great price was purchased the astonishing gift of our Redemption. In many baskets mustard takes the place of horseradish.

WINE

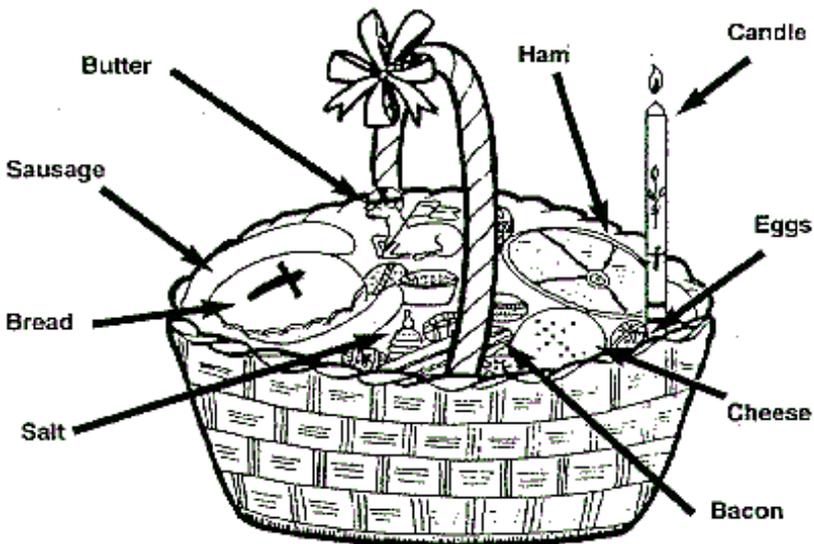
It is also customary to include a bottle of wine to symbolize the Blood of Christ. Poorer areas of Eastern Europe tended to ignore this element of the basket, but American descendants are beginning to include them once again.

CANDLE

A Paschal candle can enrich your family's observance of the Easter season, by bringing the 'light of the world' into your home in a concrete way. The candle should have a place of honor in your home, on a family prayer altar or on the table for all meals, replacing the palms that lay there during Holy Week.

The articles are placed in a WICKER basket, and a ribbon or bow is tied to the handle. A LINEN COVER, normally quite intricately embroidered with various Resurrection themes and symbols of Christ, or simply an intricate multi-colored border and the words "CHRIST IS RISEN", is placed over the food when it is brought to the church by members of the family for the blessing. It is customary for the youngest member of the family to carry the Easter basket into the church.

The basket is then shared as the first meal of Easter Sunday morning.



Sources:

1. Stockart, Father Hal, *How to put together a traditional Easter basket.*
2. Wikipedia, Online Edition
3. Writer's family customs and traditions.