



50 days of feasting

We often think of Easter as one Sunday, but in truth it is a season of FIFTY DAYS! For fifty days the Church rejoices in the ultimate good news:

**JESUS IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD!
WE DIE NO MORE.**

Within the fifty days there are special moments to focus the season. Easter Sunday is followed by its own “octave.” The Easter octave is a period of eight days following Easter Sunday. Each day of the octave holds the rank of a solemnity in the church calendar.

The Easter season is also marked by two other solemn feasts: the Ascension of the Lord and Pentecost. The Ascension reminds us that not only did Jesus walk the journey of our lives here on earth, but he also leads our way into the future. As the opening prayer for the Ascension states: “May we follow him into the new creation, for his ascension is our glory and our hope.”

Pentecost occurs fifty days after Easter, and it signals the end of the Easter Season. Pentecost was originally a Jewish feast day which occurred fifty days after Passover, commemorating the arrival of the Jewish people at Mt. Sinai where Moses received the ten commandments. The first Christians who were Jews gathered for the celebration of Pentecost, and like their ancestors, they received a gift from God, the gift of the Spirit. As Eucharistic Prayer IV puts it so beautifully, “(Jesus) sent the Holy Spirit...as his first gift to those who believe, to complete his work on earth and bring us the fullness of grace.”

Sights, Sounds and Smells of Easter time

The fifty days of Easter are joyful days. During this time, our senses are called to rejoice. We hear again the sounds of the Gloria and the Alleluia which have been omitted for all of Lent. St. Augustine says that we are an Easter people and alleluia is our song. The term alleluia is difficult to translate; it is more like a sound than a word. It is an expression of joy, a cheer, which expresses a feeling of jubilation from way down deep. Songs and acclamations of the Easter season are often filled with “alleluias.”

Visibly, the color of the vestments and other liturgical appointments are gold or white. An item of great significance during this season is the Easter candle. Each year, the church blesses a new Easter candle at the Easter Vigil service of light. This large candle is to be kept near the ambo for the entire fifty days so that it will be easy to see by the entire assembly. It should be lit for every Mass during the season of Easter. The lit candle is a powerful sign of the risen Christ's presence among us: “a pillar of fire that glows to the honor of God” (The *Exsultet* at the Easter Vigil). It is the light that shatters the darkness and

leads us on the way to salvation. After Easter, it is placed by the baptismal font and lit for baptisms and funerals. Of course, the church is filled with the fragrance of flowers, replaced as needed throughout the entire fifty days to remind us that Easter is a season, not just a day. Incense is often used at Mass during this time especially on Easter Sunday and Pentecost adding reverence and a feeling of prayer that invades all of the senses.

Signs of the Season

As with Christmas, many of the symbols associated with Easter have become secularized and often lose their religious meaning. In fact, one may be surprised to learn that such things as Easter eggs, Easter baskets and even rabbits have deeper meaning for this season. The baby chick breaking its way out of the egg has been seen as a reminder of Christ's emergence from the tomb. The prolific rabbits are a springtime reminder of life in abundance. The Easter basket, today filled with candy, once contained the Easter meal which was brought to church for a blessing. Recall that in past times, no meat was eaten for all of Lent and people fasted more extensively, so the Easter basket was a joyful sign of the end of a forty day fast. Perhaps we could also add the sight of joyful children running in search of hidden eggs or Easter baskets as a reminder of that first Easter race, when Peter and the beloved disciple ran with hope to the tomb, saw it empty and believed.

He is risen!
Alleluia Alleluia Alleluia

