

## The Easter Vigil

Since the earliest years of the Church, Holy Saturday has been held as a vigil for Jesus, our Savior and Lord. So it's not surprising that many Catholic families begin their Easter celebration with the vigil Mass on Holy Saturday. For adults and older children who have participated in the RCIA or RCIC program, and for their families and friends, the Easter Vigil is especially meaningful. This is when the candidates, or "elect," are welcomed into the Church with the sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. The vigil begins in a darkened church, which gradually moves to light, beginning with the lighting of the paschal candle. The liturgy of the Word, which can include up to nine separate readings, follows this ceremony of light. The readings focus on the great things God has done throughout salvation history. Then the candidates are "born again" through Baptism; they are welcomed into the Church. The vigil proceeds with the celebration of the Eucharist. This year ask your pastor or parish council to consider having a reception to welcome the new members.

## The Alleluias Are Back!

Many parishes and parish day schools "bury" the alleluias before Lent begins in a special ceremony with music and song. Often an "alleluia" banner is carried in procession to the front of the church where it is displayed throughout the Mass or prayer service. Numerous alleluias are said or sung throughout the Mass or service, then the banner is carried out during the recessional song, "buried" in a box, or placed in a dark closet or cupboard

until it is "resurrected" at Easter. Then it is displayed in church and accompanied with the numerous alleluias, which are prayed or sung throughout the Easter season. Some families hold their own special ceremonies at home, followed by hanging the "alleluia" banner outside for the rest of the Easter season.

## Easter Clothes

For years, Easter outfits included new shoes, dresses, hats, and purses; new shirts, ties, and slacks. Though today's "Sunday's best" isn't nearly as formal, many families still celebrate Easter by wearing new clothes. This practice is symbolic; it recognizes our new life in Christ. It is based on biblical references. If your family enjoys this Easter tradition, be sure to explain to your children the reason for wearing new clothes.

"All of you are God's children because of your faith in Christ Jesus. And when you were baptized, it was as though you had put on Christ in the same way you put on new clothes" (Galatians 3:26-27).

## Easter Baskets

Surely, one of the most popular customs we share on Easter Sunday is the giving of Easter baskets. Typically, these baskets are filled with candies in shapes symbolic of the season: crosses, eggs, bunnies, and chicks. For those who prefer to give baskets without sugary treats, here are a few ideas.

An Easter basket for the little gardener: Fill the basket with quick-growing flower and vegetable seeds, peat pots, garden gloves, and little gardening tools. These items will pro-



vide hours of fun indoors and out, and will provide "seeds" for discussion. Parents should explain that just as seeds spring into life when planted and cared for, so does our faith in Jesus.

An Easter basket for the budding bird-watcher: Fill the basket with a bird-watching book, seed, suet, and a bird feeder or house. Share with children the gift of nature, and remind them that just as we care for and feed the birds, Jesus cares for us and feeds us with the Bread of Life.

An Easter basket for kids who love good news: This basket holds an age-appropriate Bible, CD or cassette of Christian music, and Bible-based puzzles and games. Remind your children that Jesus came to share the Good News. We need to share the Good News with others, too.

## Easter Eggs

*Pysanky* are traditional Ukrainian Easter eggs, known for their beautiful, intricate designs. For decorative purposes, true *pysanky* are made with raw eggs. In this simplified version, the eggs are cooked. Though time-consuming to create, they're absolutely beautiful. Placed in a basket with Easter grass, they make an attractive, edible centerpiece.

### Supplies needed:

- hard-boiled eggs
- pastel-colored egg dyes
- candle
- pencils with erasers
- sewing pins
- blow dryer
- paper towels

### Directions:

1. Dye hard-boiled eggs.
2. Make your "egg-decorating tool" by pushing a pin into the pencil eraser.
3. Light candle and dip tip of "tool" into melted wax and apply the wax to an egg that has already been dyed a pastel color, using designs symbolic of this holy season.
4. Once the wax sets, dip the egg into a darker color. Wherever you applied the wax, the color will remain the same. Remove egg from the dye, and blot dry with paper towel.
5. Apply another design with wax. Dip egg into a different color. Repeat this process several times until you have the design you desire.
6. Once finished with design, use blow dryer to melt the wax, and then wipe with a paper towel.

## The New and Improved Easter Egg Hunt

Hunting for Easter eggs is a tradition many families hold. The custom can have great spiritual meaning. You will need about a half dozen plastic eggs (the kind that open) per child. Inside each egg, hide a clue that directs your child to the next egg; each egg brings him/her closer to the egg with the "prize." The "prize" could be an age-appropriate Bible, a book about the saints, a copy of *My Friend* magazine with a subscription, or other resources to nourish their growing faith. Once your child finds the prize, you can explain that just as the "clues" led them to their "prize," God's Word leads us to the "prize" of eternal life.



## Plant an Indoor Garden

Gardening is a wonderful activity that teaches lessons about nurturing life. Comparisons can be made between planting seeds in the garden and planting “seeds of faith.” Both need nourishment; both need constant care. As plants grow and mature, they stretch for the sun. As we grow in faith, we grow closer to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As plants need nourishment from the soil to flourish, we need nourishment from God through Scripture, the sacraments, and prayer.

Depending on where you live, it may be too early to start an outdoor garden, but it’s not too early to start one inside. By starting now, your seedlings should be ready to transplant about the time of Pentecost. So jump right in. Plant some seeds, and nourish the “seeds of faith” you’ve already planted!

### Tips for planting an indoor garden:

Choose easy to grow herbs such as mint, chives, basil, thyme, or cilantro; easy-to-grow veggies such as lettuce, beans, peas, carrots, cucumbers, zucchini, or pumpkins; or easy to grow flowers such as sunflowers, zinnias, or marigolds.

For herbs, fill 6-inch clay pots with potting soil. Plant the seeds according to the directions on the seed packets. For veggies and flowers, fill 3-inch peat pots with potting soil and plant seeds.

Place pots in a sunny location—a window facing south or west—where the plants will get five or more hours of sunlight every day.

Keep the soil moist until the seeds sprout, and then follow directions for care found on seed packets. Make sure to place pots on trays to catch any excess water.

As soon as all danger of frost is gone, transplant your seedlings, peat pot and all, to a suitable location in your garden. Herbs can be kept in pots and placed outside until late fall, when they can be brought back inside.

Establish a routine for watering, weeding, and feeding. Then enjoy the fruits of your labors.

*“The seeds that fell on good ground are the people who hear and welcome the message. They produce thirty or sixty or even a hundred times as much as was planted” (Mark 4:20).*

