

TIMELY TOPICS



DIOCESE OF COLUMBUS, OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND CATECHESIS

Easter Symbols, Rituals, and Customs

White/Gold is worn on Easter. White symbolizes new life, along with innocence, victory, joy, purity and integrity of the life of faith. Gold is the color of the light and splendor of the Resurrection.

Paschal Fire is lit before the Easter Vigil begins and is usually done outside the church. The new fire is blessed, brought into the church and shared as a symbol of the light of the risen Christ.

Paschal Candle is inscribed with five ingrained or mounted grains of incense in the form of a cross, representing Christ's wounds. The current year and the Greek letters *alpha* and *omega*, signifying Christ's presence in His church now and forever in eternity, are also inscribed on the candle. It is first lit with the new Paschal fire, then brought in procession into the church, from which the candles held by the assembly are also lit. The Paschal Candle is lit at all Masses until the end of Vespers on Pentecost as a symbol of the Resurrected Christ. It is used throughout the year at baptisms to remind Christians that in the sacrament we die and rise in Christ, and at Christian funerals as a reminder that those who die in Christ are raised up with Him.

Water is the sign of new life. In Baptism we die to ourselves and rise to Jesus Christ. During the Easter Vigil the water, used for baptisms is blessed. The newly baptized enter into a new life with Christ and become members of the Body of Christ. The assembly then is sprinkled with Holy Water to remind us of our Baptism and the renewal of our baptismal vows. The sprinkling of the assembly also is done at all Masses on Easter Sunday. The Holy Water we find

in the fonts at the entrances of the church and that we take home, is from the baptismal water.

Paschal Lamb reminds us of the sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus is the authentic and final Passover lamb of the Old Testament (Exodus 12:3-14). In some eastern European cultures, a special Easter cake is baked in the shape of a lamb and covered with white icing to look like wool.

Easter Lilies symbolizes hope and new life, also purity, virtue, innocence —the spiritual essence of Easter. Many stories exist about the Easter lily, which is often called the “white-robed apostle of hope.” Legend says that lilies were found growing in the Garden of Gethsemane after Christ's agony. Tradition also says that beautiful white lilies sprang up where drops of Christ's bloody sweat fell to the ground in his final hours of sorrow and deep distress. Churches often continue this tradition at Easter by banking the altars and surrounding the crosses with masses of Easter lilies, commemorating the resurrection of Jesus Christ and symbolizing our hope of life everlasting.

Easter Eggs are derived from an ancient symbol of spring and fertility. Gradually, eggs came to represent the stone tomb from which Christ emerged to new life. At another

(Continued on page 2)

*IN BAPTISM WE DIE TO
OURSELVES AND RISE TO
JESUS CHRIST.*

Inside this issue

Correlation to Certification Standards & the Graded Course of Study	2
Resources	2
Prayer Service	3

(Continued from page 1)

time, eating eggs was forbidden during Lent. Eventually they became a special sign of Easter joy, painted or dyed in bright colors, then blessed and given as gifts. Greeks and Syrians dye the eggs crimson in honor of the blood of Christ. The people of Poland and Ukraine use wax, a special dye and a stylus to create colorful eggs with symbols known as *pysankies*. Friends and relatives exchange them to show good wishes. Armenians use religious pictures to decorate empty eggs for gifts. In some parts of Germany, the decorated eggs are hung from



shrubs and trees. An Easter Egg Hunt for hidden eggs is nearly universal. ✨

Correlation to Certification Standards & the Graded Course of Study

Religion Graded Course of Study

Content Standard II-C:

Describe Jesus Christ as our Savior who redeemed us by his life, death, resurrection and ascension.

National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers

Standard 3, Catholic Theology:

3.2.2 Describe the meanings and message of the paschal mystery

3.4.1 Explain basic liturgical principles, the liturgical year... the devotional and sacramental life of the church, and components of liturgical celebrations

The Six Tasks of Catechesis

Knowledge of the Faith

“... By deepening knowledge of the faith, catechesis nourishes not only the life of faith but equips it to explain itself to the world...”

Liturgical Education

“... catechesis, along with promoting a knowledge of the liturgy and the sacraments, must also educate the disciples of Jesus Christ for prayer...”

Teaching to Pray

“... When catechesis is permeated by a climate of prayer, the assimilation of the entire Christian life reaches its summit...”

Resources

Ball, Ann. *Encyclopedia of Catholic Devotions and Practices*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2003.

Dues, Greg. *Catholic Customs & Traditions: A popular guide*. Revised and Updated. New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2000.

Editors of *Modern Liturgy*. *The Triduum Book*. San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, Inc., 1997.

Klein, Peter, Rev. *The Catholic Source Book*. Newly Revised. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Religion Publishers, 2007.

Larkin, Jean. *Totally Lent! A Child's Journey to Easter 2011*. Dayton, OH: Pflaum Publishing Group, 2011

Larkin, Jean. *Totally Lent! A Kid's Journey to Easter 2011*. Dayton, OH: Pflaum Publishing Group, 2011

Prayer Service
(for upper elementary students through adulthood)

A Baptismal Remembrance
Prayer with Water Ritual

Materials: Paschal Candle; matches; large bowl with water; (or small bowls on each table); copies for readers with parts highlighted; **optional:** CD player; CD, "We Remember" by Marty Haugen; song-sheets with words of refrain

Directions: *After the opening litany and during the readings from the Blessing of the Water in the Rite for Baptism, invite the participants to come forward whenever they feel ready and bless themselves with the water in the bowl. With a large group, ask for one person from each table to come forward and retrieve some water for each group with the small bowls found on each table. Individuals seated at the table can bless themselves from the small bowl.*

LITANY

Leader: Gracious God, we gather to remember our Baptism and to pray for those who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil. (*light Paschal Candle*)

Praise to you, almighty God and Father, for you have created water to cleanse and to give life.

All: Blessed be God.

Leader: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, the Father's only Son, for you offered yourself on the cross, that in the blood and water flowing from your side, and through your death and resurrection, the Church might be born.

All: Blessed be God.

Leader: Praise to you, God the Holy Spirit, for you anointed Christ at his baptism in the waters of Jordan, so that we might all be baptized into you.

All: Blessed be God.

Leader: Let us remember that we were called to this cleansing water of Baptism that we might share in the faith of your Church and have eternal life. **Amen.**

READINGS

Leader: *Repeat directions, above; conclude with* As you feel ready, dip your fingers into the water and bless yourself with the Sign of the Cross, while together we listen to the story of God's love for us.

Reader # 1: Father, You gave us grace through sacramental signs, which tell us of the wonders of your unseen power.

Reader # 2: In baptism we have been given your gift of water, which is a rich symbol of the grace you give us in this sacrament.



Reader # 3: At the very dawn of creation your Spirit breathed on the waters, making them the wellspring of all holiness.

Reader # 4: The waters of the great flood you made a sign of the waters of baptism, that make an end of sin and a new beginning of goodness.

Reader # 5: Through the waters of the Red Sea you led Israel out of slavery, to be an image of God's holy people, set free from sin by baptism.

Reader # 6: In the waters of the Jordan your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Spirit.

Reader # 7: Your Son willed that water and blood should flow from his side as he hung upon the cross.

Reader # 8: After his resurrection he told his disciples: "Go out and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Reader # 9: Father, look now with love upon your Church, and unseal for her the fountain of baptism.

Reader #10: By the power of the Spirit give to the water of this font the grace of your Son.

Reader #11: You created us in your own likeness: you cleansed us from sin in a new birth to innocence by water and the Spirit.

Leader: Loving God, you send the Holy Spirit upon us. May all who are buried with Christ in the death of baptism rise also with him to newness of life. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen. *Conclude with the Sign of the Cross*

Optional: All sing the refrain from "We Remember."

We remember how you loved us to your death, and still we celebrate, for you are with us here; and we believe that we will see you when you come in your glory, Lord.

We remember, we celebrate, we believe.

©1980, GIA Publications, Inc. All rights reserved.
Used with permission