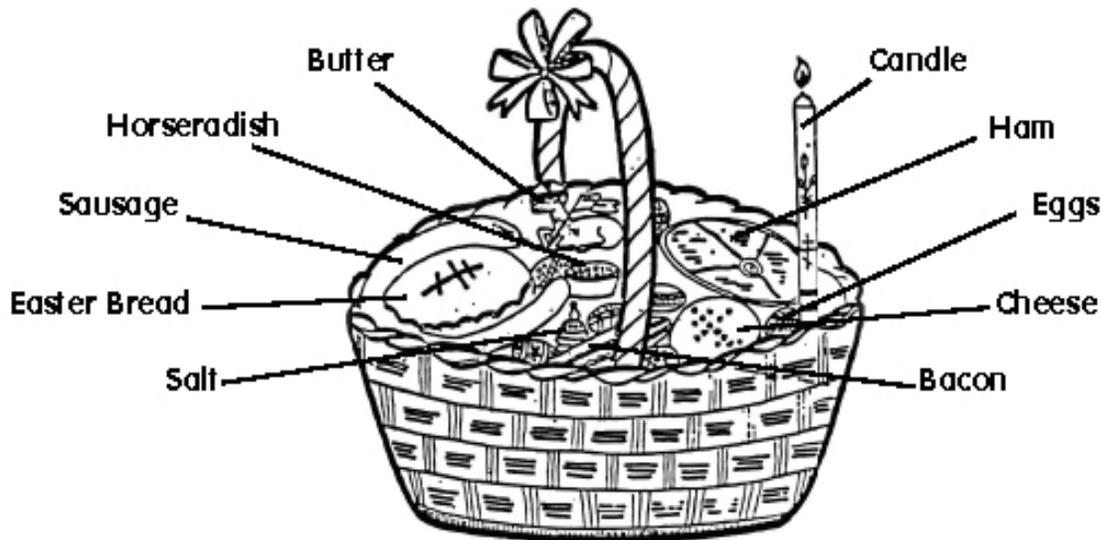


Blessing of the Easter Food Baskets

Holy Saturday at 1:00 pm



Blessing of Food in Easter Baskets

When Holy Saturday arrives, households especially in central Europe are busy getting ready for the great feast of Easter. Foods are prepared such as the Easter ham and bread. Eggs are boiled and painted and the whole house is decked with flowers and finery. Millions of Slavic people journey to their parish church with baskets of food to be blessed every Holy Saturday usually between 12:00 and 3:00 p.m. In some regions the priests go from house to house to bless the Easter food.

The Polish people call this sacred pilgrimage “**Swienconka!**” (shvye-tsoonka). It is also the word they use to refer to the Easter foods taken to church for the priest’s blessings.

These foods were often carried in baskets that were specially woven and covered with a beautiful cloth, often a work of embroidered art on brilliant white, a sign of purity. Sometimes “greens” such as the pussy willow or ferns adorn the basket as a sign of the new greening of spring. Some large baskets are filled to the brim with food while smaller baskets carry symbolic items. The first meal eaten on Easter morning will be these blessed foods. This breaks the fasting and abstinence of the six weeks of Lent.

What foods are placed in the Easter basket?

THE EASTER EGG which is the first food to be eaten on Easter morning. It symbolizes new life and for Catholics and Christians re-birth. Among the customs of the past, two foods forbidden during the six weeks of Lent were eggs and milk. The eggs that were gathered during Lent were boiled, or preserved and saved until Easter. Some say that all the eggs gathered before Lent were used up in the making of paczki (Jelly donuts) for Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday.

Eggs are colored and decorated to represent a joyous revitalization. Visitors to households are given a decorated Easter egg. The colored egg is symbolic of the tomb into which our Lord was placed. As the newborn chick must burst the shell to begin new life, so our Lord bursts the bonds of death for all of His followers.

KIELBASA, HAM OR PORK all of these types of pork were expressly forbidden under the former dietary code of the covenant inscribed in the Old Testament (Lev. 11 :7). Since our Lord Jesus comes to fulfill and exceed the law, the old needs make place for the new. These formerly forbidden dietary items are now most acceptable in the human diet (Mark 7:19)

HORSERADISH AND/OR PEPPER symbolize the bitter herbs of the Passover and the Exodus. They signify (1) the bitterness of spiritual exile (2) the bitterness of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ and (3) a reflection upon our human sufferings.

SALT has been used as a commodity, as a medium of exchange, and as barter in trade throughout history. The phrase, “worth his salt” derives from the practice of paying soldiers and others in salt, as currency. It is the most fundamental of all spices and preservatives. It reminds us that as the result of our holy baptism in Christ, we are by His words, the “salt of the earth”.

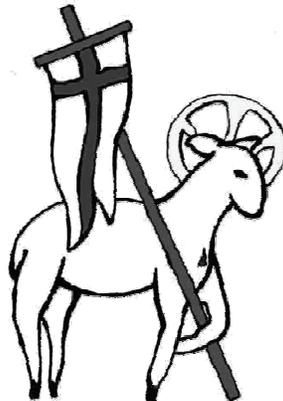
BREAD -symbolizes the bread of the Eucharistic Meal and vividly declares that “Christ is known to us in the breaking of bread” as He was to the disciples at Emmaus.

PASCHAL LAMB BUTTER -butter is molded into the shape of a lamb. The lamb is central to the Catholic/Christian faith. Isaiah announced, “He was as a lamb led to the slaughter”, John the Baptist declared: “Behold the Lamb of God”, Our Lord proclaimed “I am the Good Shepherd”, the Apocalypse states that the Lamb is the Victor over death. The lamb is also central to the Exodus experience of the ancient Israelites of whom we are spiritual descendants. Often the Lamb is featured carrying a victorious red banner imprinted with across. The sacrificial animal of ancient times is now portrayed as Christ victorious.

WINE is often added to the Swienconka menu. It reminds us of the blood of sacrifice which Jesus Christ spilled for us on Calvary. The fruit of the vine and the amber wave of grain bring us the most Blessed Sacrament, Holy Eucharist.

What is the custom of the sharing of the Easter egg?

In Polish this sharing is called “Dzielenie sie Jajkiem” which means “We are sharing the egg.” On Easter morning, one hard boiled Easter egg is shelled, then cut into pieces equal to the number of people present at this first meal plus one piece or slice reserved to symbolize the presence of Christ, our risen Lord. The egg is sprinkled with blessed salt to remind us that we are the “salt of the earth” Mt.5:14. Then blessed pepper and/or horseradish are added to symbolize the bitter herbs of life. As family and guests partake of this one egg in commemoration of Christ risen from his tomb, they share good wishes with one another. The Polish proclaim “Wesolego” -”Alleluia!”



Written by Connie Walters, 4/2/94.
Resources: *The Special Blessings of a
Polish Easter for Everyone*
by Rev. M. Krysa and
“Easter, that exquisite, edible feast”,
Our Sunday Visitor, April 3, 1994.