Easter Sunday
4.12.20

A BASKET OF BLESSING ...
A REASON FOR REJOICING

When I a child at my ethnic parish in Ohio, we and all Polish parishes had a Holy Saturday tradition – the “Blessing of Easter Baskets.” On Holy Saturday morning, families would bring a basket filled with a sampling of the foods that would be shared at their Easter dinner. Everybody’s basket contained pretty much the same items: a hardboiled egg, a cut of baked ham, a link of sausage, butter that was formed into the shape of a lamb, chocolate eggs (Fanny Farmer’s, not See’s), a loaf of bread or a roll, horseradish, a sprig of green herbs. There might have been some vinegar, some salt and a candle.... And a bottle of wine (in Toledo sixty years ago, that would have been Blue Nun or Lancer’s not, Beringer or Duckhorn).

Many of the baskets were covered with spring flowers and a beautifully embroidered cloth. The ceremony took only about 10-15 minutes. The priest came into the parish hall (which was in the basement underneath the church -- nothing quite like the St. Perpetua new Community Center). All the baskets were lined up on long tables; the priest said a prayer and sprinkled the baskets with holy water. Then, everyone took their basket and went back home. That was it – pretty simple, but there was a wonderful spirit of community, a sense of sharing, joyful anticipation of the next day’s Feast of Easter, and the nourishment of food and family, of faith and tradition. It wasn’t until years later, that I realized that it was all about that, but so much more. Our simple ethnic ritual was a creative catechetical moment, a teaching tool, the Easter story in a basket. It was a religion book and bible all decked out for Easter:

The Bread of course, symbolized Jesus, the Risen Lord; He, who at the Last Supper, gave us the Eucharist, the food to nourish our faith on our earthly journey -- Jesus who said “I am the Bread of Life; whoever comes to me will never grow hungry.” You and I eagerly anticipate the day when we can be together again to share the Lord’s Supper. In the meantime, let your table at home, in your “house church,” be your altar and surround it with love and thanksgiving. Remember, Jesus said: “Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst.”

The butter or cake in the shape of a lamb also referred to Jesus, the Lamb of God, the Paschal lamb of sacrifice.

The horseradish represented the bitter herbs that were part of the Passover meal. It stood for the bitterness of life the Israelites endured in slavery before they were led by Moses into the Promised Land; and the
bitterness of Jesus’ passion which won for us our salvation. The **vinegar** represented the gall that was given to Jesus by one of the soldiers as he hung on the cross, when he said: “I thirst”. The **wine** symbolized the blood of sacrifice spilled by Christ at the crucifixion. The gospel of John says: *...and a soldier pierced his side with a lance and immediately blood and water flowed out.* The **egg** has always been a symbol new life and resurrection. Jesus came forth from the tomb as a chick breaks the shell of the egg and enters into life.

The link of **sausage** reminded us that by his Resurrection Jesus broke the chains of death and overcame sin and death forever. **Ham** was a sign of goodness and the abundance of God’s blessings. Pork was forbidden in the Old Law, but Jesus proclaimed the New Law of freedom. **Salt** in ancient times was life because it could preserve food and give flavor, so Jesus told his disciples and all of us: “*You are the salt of the earth.*” A **Candle** represented Jesus, the Light of the Word, and the Paschal Candle that is lit from the new fire at the Easter Vigil. And Jesus commissioned us as his disciples: “*You are the light of the world...let your light shine so that others may see your good works and give praise to our heavenly Father.*” Of course, it wouldn’t be an Easter basket without **chocolate candy**, either in the form of eggs or bunnies. That was the sweetness of life shared with one another as we celebrated being born again to new life through the Resurrection of Jesus.

When the ceremony was over we took our baskets and went back to our homes, because that was the place where our faith was lived out most fully. The food blessing at church was beautiful, but it was a symbolic blessing for all the food at home; for all the life that was lived at home, for the singing and laughing, the games and fun, yes, for the bickering and frustration, the fighting and forgiving, and all the loving that went on there. We knew that each home was a “domestic church,” each kitchen or dining room table was our altar – a place where the Holy Spirit dwelt, and where the Risen Lord was always present as our friend and companion.

With **OUR EYES** we could see the beauty of Easter as the earth awakens once more... With **OUR EARS** we could hear the birds singing to tell us Spring again is here... With **OUR HANDS** we picked the flowers in our gardens that brought beauty to our lives But mostly with **OUR HEARTS** could we feel the MIRACLE of GOD’S LOVE which redeems all people... And only with **OUR SOUL** can we make our 'pilgrimage to God' and receive God’s greatest Easter Gift -- ETERNAL LIFE.
Let your Easter faith enrich your home -- let it touch your family living, your daily joys and struggles. Let the Risen Lord be your help and guide as we make our way through this difficult time we and our world are facing. Let the example of Jesus who washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper be your model and example of loving service to one another. Let the passion of Jesus on the Cross who looked compassionately on the good thief crucified at his side and on his mother standing at the foot of the cross, awaken your compassion for all those who are suffering from the Coronavirus.

And, most of all, let your Easter faith bring you hope, that like the women at the tomb who heard the announcement of the angel, and the disciples who ran to find it empty, we may once again be surprised at the wonders God can do in drawing life out of death, joy out of sorrow, and healing and wholeness out a virus that can keep us from gathering but can never separate us from Christ, our Risen Lord, or from our bond of Communion as the People of God.

John Kasper, osfs