



Feast of the Founding

The ideas in this column are taken in great part from an article by Michael Pakaluk in *The Catholic Thing* on 3 April 2018.

Sunday is not a big enough day for Easter. It takes a whole season—fifty days of feasting after forty days of fasting—to come to grips with the stupendous mystery of the stone rolled away from the tomb.

The immobile obstacle of the stone that marks Jesus' burial stands in stark contrast to the rising star in the sky that signals His birth. So does the season of the Lord's return to His Father inversely link us to the season of His coming to live with us as man. "Christmas is a feast of the world," Michael Pakaluk says; "Easter . . . is a feast of the Church."

"The world loves to celebrate a Christmas season," Pakaluk observes. As carols fill the air, the buying of presents makes the economy go 'round. In eye-catching contrast to winter's faded colors, festive lighting glows on city streets, on stores, on houses and the trees within them. "Happy Holidays" may replace "Merry Christmas," but secular celebration rolls merrily along.

We Christians keep the season because Jesus is its reason, but our memory *as Church* does not reach directly back to the event itself. To get to the manger at the beginning we must first step into the tomb at the end. Strange to say, the Christmas story could not be told but for Easter.

In Bethlehem, as Mary and Joseph marveled at their newborn Child, there was no Church to join them in wonderment, no Church to spread the news of the Messiah's birth; for not till thirty years later would the Church be born from the side of the Crucified. Those who witnessed His birth emerged from obscurity and went back to it again. The evangelists name not a one of them, nor do they tell what became of them. All we know is that the shepherds returned to their flocks and the Magi to their homeland. No one sent them as witnesses of what they had seen or told them to make known what it meant. The Great Commission could only come after the death and rising of Mary's Son.

But the ever-expanding commerce of Christmas dwarfs the short-lived marketing of Easter, so the feast of Christ's Rising does not provoke the overflowing civic celebration that surrounds the feast of His Birth. As winter's wearying darkness gives way to springtime's invigorating daylight, the allure of reviving nature increasingly

absorbs cultural attention, energy, and time. There is no Paschal season for the world.

Not to worry, Michael Pakaluk says. "Easter is not . . . for the world: it is for the Church." The Risen Christ manifested His victory to those who believed in Him and followed Him, not to the world that rejected and defeated Him. As St. Peter proclaimed, "God granted that [this man] be visible, not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance" – witnesses trained and tested for their mission and sent forth by the Master Himself to be His Apostles to the world. "He who hears you hears Me," He told them, "and he who rejects you rejects Me."

By God's design Easter is an *Apostolic* feast. Without the Apostles' testimony, there would be no Paschal Mystery because there would be no Church to live it. Your faith and mine is founded on this Apostolic Tradition and can never go beyond it.

The Paschal Mystery--the Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of God's Son and the sending of the Spirit--was revealed to the Church, not to the world, so that "the world might be saved" by accepting the Gospel which the Church exists to make known and loved and lived.