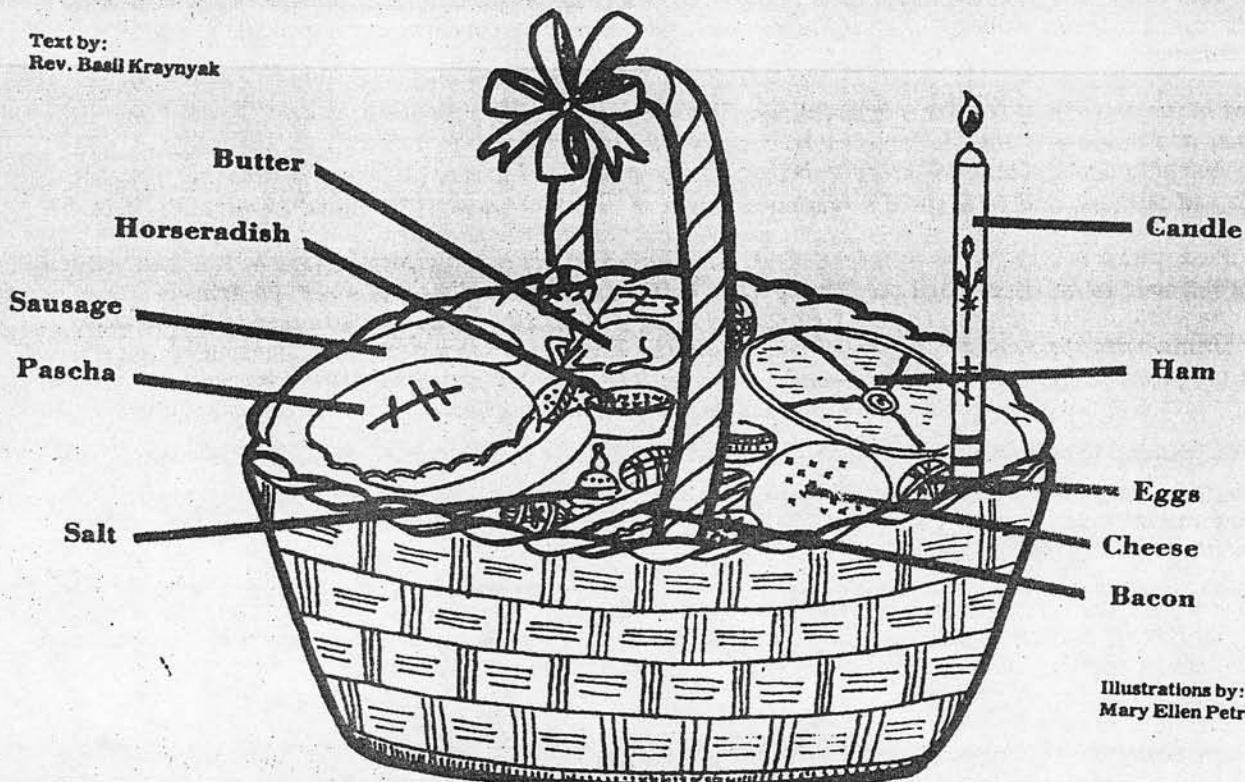


How to Put Together a Traditional Easter Basket

Text by:
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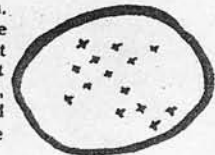


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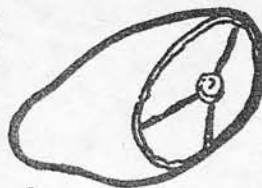


PASCHA - The Easter Bread (pron. pá-ska.) A sweet, yeast bread rich in eggs, butter, etc. Symbolic of Christ Himself who is our True Bread. Usually a round loaf baked with a golden crust decorated with a symbol indicative of Christ. Sometimes a cross (+) of dough is placed on top encircled by a plait giving it a crowned effect or Greek abbreviations for the name of Christ. The letters XB indicate the Slavonic for Christ is (Xrisen).

CHEESE (Slav. Hrudka or Sirets pron. hrood-ka or si-rets) A custard-type cheese shaped into a ball having a rather bland but sweet taste indicative of the moderation that Christians should have in all things. Also, creamed cheese is placed in a small dish and both are decorated with symbols (see Pascha) out of cloves or pepper balls.

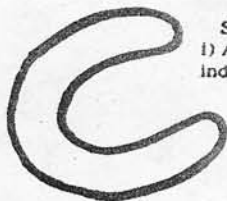
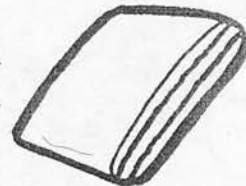


HAM (Slav Šunka - pron. shoon-ka.) The flesh meat popular with the Slavs as the main dish because of its richness and symbolic of the great joy and abundance of Easter. Some may prefer Lamb or Veal. This is usually well roasted or cooked as well as other meats so that the festivity of the day will not be burdened with preparation and all may enjoy the Feast.

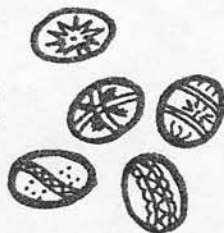


BUTTER (Slav. Maslo pron. má-slo) This favorite dairy product is shaped into a figure of a Lamb or small cross and decorated as the cheese. This reminds us of the goodness of Christ that we should have toward all things.

BACON (Slav. Slanina pron. sla-ni-na) A piece of uncooked bacon cured with spices. Symbolic of the overabundance of God's mercy to us.



SAUSAGE (SLAV. Kolbasi - pron. kol-buá-i) A spicy, garlicky sausage of pork products, indicative of God's favor and generosity.



EGGS (Slav. Pisanki pron. pi-sún-ki) Hard-boiled eggs brightly decorated with symbols and markings made with beeswax. Indicative of new life and resurrection.



SALT (Slav. Sol' pron. sol') A condiment necessary for flavor reminding the Christian of his duty to others.



HORSERADISH (Slav. Chrin pron. khrin) Horseradish mixed with grated red beets. Symbolic of the Passion of Christ still in our minds but sweetened with some sugar because of the Resurrection. A bitter-sweet red colored mixture reminds us of the sufferings of Christ.

These articles are placed in a wicker basket and a ribbon or bow is tied to the handle. A decorated candle is placed in the basket and is lit at the time of blessing. A linen cover usually embroidered with a picture of the Risen Christ or symbol with the words "Christ is Risen" is placed over the food when brought to the Church.

In some places a large Easter Bread (Pascha) is made and brought separately in a large linen cloth. If the origin of the people was from a wine growing area, a sweet wine may be brought.



"Artos" is a Greek word which means bread made with yeast. The Artos is blessed on Easter Sunday after the Ambon Prayer which is said at the end of the Liturgy. Even though this is a custom and an world tradition in our Byzantine Church, we find regrettably that only a few churches carry out this practice. This custom still prevails in the Ukrainian and Orthodox churches.

The prayer used in the blessing of the Artos is as follows: "We bless and sanctify this bread on this Paschal day, for the honor, praise and memory of the glorious Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom we are released, freed ... We further ask Almighty God to bless this bread and that all who partake of it may share in His Heavenly gifts and be free of all pain and sickness, and be granted salvation of soul and health of body." ["Trebnik", Žokva, Pp 602-604]

During Easter Week, which is also known as Bright Week, the blessed bread, covered with an icon of the Resurrection, remains on the Tetrapod to be kissed until the Sunday after Easter (St. Thomas Sunday), when the Artos is distributed to the faithful. According to the old custom, the Artos was distributed on the Saturday of Bright Week after the Holy Liturgy with the prayer, "this bread may be for the health and sanctification of the soul of him who eats of it." In the former centuries the faithful would preserve little pieces of bread for those who were seriously ill or in danger of death and unable to receive Holy Communion. They would be given a piece of artos as a substitute for Holy Communion.

The Artos reminds the faithful that Christ came from Heaven to Earth, took on a human body, suffered for us, was crucified, and on the third day arose from the dead to be with us always to the end of the world. Our Lord said of Himself: "I am the living bread who came down from Heaven" (John 6:51).

In the Byzantine Church the Artos was regarded and preserved by the faithful as Sacred Bread. It reminds us of the occasion when our Lord at the Last Supper, on Holy Thursday, with His Disciples present, instituted the Holy Eucharist. It recalls to our minds that He is permanently among us. It also reminds us of His appearance to the Disciples after the Resurrection, when He blessed the food and did eat of it with them. Again we are reminded of His words to Cleophas and Lucas on their way to the village of Emmaus when He interpreted the Scriptures in regard to things referring to Himself, and they did recognize Him when He reclined at the table with them, and He took bread and blessed, and broke and began handing it to them. (Luke 24:27-35)

According to the oldest tradition, the Apostles, after the Ascension of Our Lord, placed bread on the table (altar) each time during the services, for the Divine Master. This they did for their Master, confessing or believing in His invisible presence among them. At the end of the services they took the bread and lifted it up with the words: "Glory be to You, O Christ, Our God, Glory be to You. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit." The Apostles, after receiving the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Day, went to preach the Gospel throughout the world and, according to tradition, left a loaf of bread on the altar in remembrance of His Glorious Resurrection.

The origin of the blessing of bread can be found in the Old Testament, where we read that on a table set on the right side of the Sanctuary of the Temple were twelve loaves of bread representing the twelve tribes of Israel. This bread was replaced each Saturday (Sabbath) by the celebrating priest, who alone was permitted to eat this bread. The Holy Bible does tell us about the exceptional case when David and his soldiers were permitted to eat the bread because of being near starvation (Matt 12:4).

As the unleavened bread had a great significance to the Jews in the Old Testament, so the Artos has for us in the New Testament. As bishop, St. Cyril, the great writer and preacher in the 12th century writes: "As the Jews in Egypt were preparing unleavened bread for their big journey through the Red Sea, and after crossing the Sea they did eat the bread, so we, Christians, saved through the Resurrection of our Savior from sin, lift up the Artos, which is exposed on the table during Bright Week and eat it on Saturday, the last day of Bright Week. As the unleavened bread was eaten for the health of the people who ate it, so is this bread given for the health and sanctification of our soul and body."

This example which was set by the Apostles is still followed in many monasteries and some parishes today. After the Holy Liturgy during Bright Week, with the singing of "Christ is Risen," the celebrant elevates the Artos and carries it from the church to the monastery dining room. After dinner, he again elevates the Bread and welcomes the brethren with the words, "Christ is Risen," and they respond "Indeed He is Risen." The celebrant then takes the Artos Bread back into the church as the singing of "Christ is Risen..." continues. May we note that in the Byzantine Church, at the Vespers with the Litija, on the solemn Holydays, we have the blessing of five loaves of bread, wheat, wine and oil. The celebrant in prayer asks God to "bless these loaves, wheat, wine and oil" and "multiply them in this city and throughout the world and to sanctify the faithful who partake of them." The blessing of the five loaves brings to mind the miraculous act of Jesus Christ when He blessed the five loaves in the wilderness and thus fed 5,000 men, not counting the women and children (Mt.14:20-21). The Blessed Bread should remind us of the Heavenly Bread -- the Holy Eucharist -- our daily bread, which we need in order to sustain our spiritual life. In the first centuries when Services called for an all-night vigil, this bread was distributed to all participants to give them the strength the body needed to fulfill the all-night vigil.