

Fourth Week of Easter

From the Blessing of the Water at the Rite of Baptism

Father, you give us grace through
sacramental signs,
which tell us of the wonders of your
unseen power.

In baptism we use your gift of water,
which you have made a rich symbol
of the grace
you give us in this sacrament.

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

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. . . .

By the power of the Holy Spirit
give to the water the grace of your Son,
so that in the sacrament of baptism
all those whom you have created in
your likeness
may be cleansed from sin
and rise to a new birth of innocence
by water and the Holy Spirit. . . .

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

May 3, 2009 Living Symbols

How often have you heard someone say, dismissively, "It's just a symbol"? Our Easter celebrations are filled with symbols. We use water in the washing of the feet on Holy Thursday and the baptisms at the Easter Vigil. We light the Paschal candle in church and candles symbolizing the Christ light in our homes. Whereas a sign, such as a street sign, gives information about something (the name of the street), it does not participate in the reality it represents.

Religious symbols, unlike signs, participate in the meaning and power of the reality they represent; they unlock dimensions of reality that would otherwise be closed to us. Christian symbols don't just give us information *about* God; they help us connect *with* God. The power of symbols can be weakened for us when we use them carelessly or infrequently. Bring the great symbols of our faith home this Easter and use them with reverence and joy.

This Week at Home

Monday, May 4

Keep the Season Fresh

No, the feast isn't over yet, but our Easter lilies may be looking a little tired by now. It's time to give the symbols of Easter, fire and water, new expression in our homes. Make a new centerpiece for the dinner table. Try filling a bowl with water. Cut flower heads and float the flowers, along with floating candles, in the water.

Tuesday, May 5

The Christians at Antioch

Today's reading (Acts 11:19–26) tells of the growth of the early Christian community in Antioch, in spite of the many persecutions that had scattered the disciples. The work of Christ continues in the battle against oppression and persecution. It is important, as we celebrate and give thanks for Christ's victory over death, to recognize that his victory continues to find expression in our daily lives as we work for the freedom and dignity of all people. The history of the fledgling church teaches us not to underestimate God's power. In many places there will be fiestas, food, music, and dancing today as Mexican Americans celebrate Cinco de Mayo, the victory of a small Mexican army over Napoleon's army. That battle became a symbol of victory against overwhelming odds.



Wednesday, May 6

Lamb Cake

Easter is called Pasch—from the Jewish Passover, *Pesach*, which celebrates the exodus from Egypt. Christ is called the Paschal Lamb, a reference to the lambs slaughtered to save the Jewish people at the first Passover. Many Easter foods are made with lamb. It is also traditional to make a cake in the shape

of a lamb. Lamb molds can be purchased at cake supply stores or online at www.fantes.com. Grease the mold. Mix a pound cake recipe (add a little orange or lemon zest), and fill the mold no more than two-thirds full. Gently tap to remove air bubbles. Bake as directed. The cake is done when it springs back when touched lightly or when an inserted toothpick comes out clean. Cool and frost your cake, sprinkling with coconut to make your lamb look woolly.

Thursday, May 7

Mary's Month

Many Marian traditions replaced ancient spring festivals. The maypole (a decorated tree) was a symbol of nature's triumph over the death of winter. That custom, along with another, crowning a "May Queen," naturally became associated in Christian tradition with Mary, the Mother of Our Lord and the Queen of Heaven. Statues of Mary are crowned with wreaths of flowers while the faithful sing songs to Mary. Keep a vase of flowers by a statue or picture of Mary this month.

Friday, May 8

Danish Day of Prayer

For Danish people, the fourth Friday after Easter is called *Store Bededag* and is observed as a day of prayer. A square bread called *hvedebrød* is eaten with the evening meal. Shops are closed and people attend special church services to pray for peace. Begin a family book of intercessions today. Before dinner, ask family members to write down the names of those needing prayer, then have everyone consult the book before saying their night prayers.

Saturday, May 9

Life-giving Water

In this season, we reflect on how precious water is. It cleanses us and nourishes us. It is in baptismal waters that we are born to new life in Christ. Yet, throughout the world forty thousand people die each day from causes directly related to water contamination. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) works to increase access to clean water by building wells and reducing water pollution. You can help by buying a project share in a CRS water project. Go to <http://gifts.crs.org/health/ethiopia.cfm> or call 1-888-277-7575.



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PASCHAL MISSION
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