

## **Blessing of Baskets**

In many Eastern European countries, it is a tradition to have a basket of food blessed on Holy Saturday or Easter Sunday. In Poland, for example, the blessing of the baskets is a practice dating to the 15th century or earlier, and one which is still maintained by many families in many countries on Holy Saturday.

The food items in the Easter basket, as well as at the Easter Sunday breakfast when the blessed food is eaten, have special significance. Each family may have its own traditions, but there are some practices that are universal.

### **Basket Decorations**

A lot of thought, time, and care are put not only into the foods that will go into the basket but also to how the basket is assembled. The basket is lined with an embroidered cloth or traditional folk fabric. Once the basket is filled, it is covered with a white linen cloth (some have a colorfully crocheted edging or embroidered design) representing the shroud of Christ. The basket can then be decorated with sprigs of boxwood or "palms" made from dried flowers and colorful paper.

### **Symbolic Foods**

A typical Eastern European Easter basket would include a variety of symbolic foods, although families can personalize to their liking. There is a special blessing for meat, egg, cake, and bread, so baskets will most likely include these ingredients.

Bacon is a symbol of the abundance of God's mercy.

Bread is usually a braided *chalka*, representing the staff of life given by God.

Easter bread is a round cake of rich, eggy yeast dough with raisins that is reminiscent of the risen Lord.

Butter is one of the dairy products included to celebrate the end of Lent and the richness of our salvation. The butter is often shaped into a lamb, which is symbolic of the Paschal Lamb.

Sometimes the lamb is made of dough, wood, or even plastic. It can also be made of sugar.

Candles symbolize Jesus, the "light of the world," and can be lit when the priest blesses the baskets of food.

Cheese is a symbol to remind Christians of moderation.

Colored eggs as well as uncolored hard-cooked eggs, indicate hope, new life, and Christ rising from his tomb.

Ham, as well as other meats, symbolizes great joy and abundance in celebration of Christ's resurrection.

Sausage links (*kiełbasa*) are symbolic of the chains of death that were broken when Jesus rose from the dead, as well as of God's generosity.

Horseradish is a reminder of the bitterness and harshness of the Passion of Jesus, and the vinegar it is mixed with symbolizes the sour wine given to Jesus on the cross.

Salt is present to add zest to life and preserve us from corruption.

Sweets suggest the promise of eternal life or good things to come.

### **Family Traditions**

Although every family might have its own traditions when it comes to the Easter baskets, many make sure to include enough food so every family member can have a bite of all the blessed foods after Mass on Easter Sunday. This can be a taste of the Easter dinner foods, plus some daily staples.

The basket may hold a little bird's nest cake made with leftover batter from the lamb cake and hard-cooked eggs studded with cloves representing the nails of the cross, as well as kielbasa, ham, salt, and pepper. Also common are a butter lamb, or butter stuffed into a shot glass studded with a clove, and a small, round bakery rye bread topped with a paper decal in the shape of a purple cross. While in some families, greens, vegetables, and fruit are never included, other families make them a part of the basket.

In many families when the children are old enough, they are given the honor of taking the basket to church to be blessed. There is no risk of the basket being picked over since it is a time of fasting, and the children are sure to be admonished that they do not touch one morsel of food. With the aromas so intoxicating, it takes tremendous willpower not to sample.

### ***Blessing of Meats***

O God, through Moses you commanded your people in their deliverance from Egypt to kill a lamb and mark their doorposts with its blood. We understand this to prefigure our deliverance by Jesus' shedding of his blood. May it please you to + bless and sanctify this meat which we desire to eat in praise of him, our Paschal Lamb, who lives and reigns for ever and ever.  
Amen.

### ***Blessing of Bread***

Almighty, everlasting God, be pleased to + bless this bread. May it be a healthful food for body and soul, a safeguard against every disease and a defense against all harm. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, the bread of life, who came down from heaven and gives life and salvation to all the world, who lives and reigns for ever and ever.  
Amen.

### ***Blessing of Dairy Foods***

O God, creator and author of all being + bless these cheeses and butter and other dairy foods. Keep us in your love, so that as we partake of them, we may be filled with your bountiful gifts on account of our Lord's glorious resurrection from the dead. We give you glory to you, our Father without beginning, to your Son who is our true food, and to your good and life-giving Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.

### **Blessing of Eggs**

Father in heaven, let your + blessing come upon these eggs. When we break them, we see a sign of your Son rising to new life from the tomb. May we eat them in joyful celebration of his resurrection, for he lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

### **Blessing of Cakes and Pastries**

Lord Jesus Christ, living bread of everlasting life, + bless these cakes and pastries as you once blessed the five loaves in the wilderness. As we eat them may we receive the health we desire for body and soul. We ask this of you, our risen Lord, who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

### **Blessing of other Foods (including Horseradish)**

O God, through Moses you directed the Israelites to carry their sheaves to the priests for a blessing. Hear our prayers and + shower abundant blessings on us and these assorted foods which we gratefully present to you in honor of your Son's resurrections. Grant that we may find them a remedy against sickness, a source of strength for our bodies, and a protection of soul, by calling on your holy name. We ask this through Christ our risen Lord. Amen.

### **Blessing of Wine**

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of living God, in Cana of Gailee you changed water into wine. Be pleased to + bless this wine which you have given us as refreshment. Grant that whenever it is taken as drink it may be accompanied by an outpouring of your live-giving grace, for ever and ever. Amen.

### **Blessing of Children and Their Easter Baskets**

Loving God, long ago you told your people to bring the good things for eating and celebrating to your altar in thanksgiving. They obeyed and brought you their baskets of food and grain before they ate and celebrated. Today these boys and girls do the same as they come here with their Easter baskets. We ask to + bless them and their parents and friends. Grant that they and their families may appreciate all that you give them. + Bless their Easter eggs and candy and all that the baskets contain, with which they will celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, your Son and our brother. As they eat these foods and candies may their Easter joy increase. We ask this through Christ our risen Lord. Amen.

### **Blessing of Beer**

Lord, bless this creature, beer, which by Your kindness and power has been produced from kernels of grain, and let it be a healthful drink for mankind. Grant that whoever drinks it with thanksgiving to Your holy name may find it a help in body and in soul; through Christ our Lord. Amen.