

Some Popular Customs at Easter

1) The best known of these traditions is the use of eggs. This custom has its practical origin and symbolic meaning. We must know that almost all the popular customs of the Church had their origin in some practical use; their symbolic meaning usually coming later. Under natural conditions, chickens start laying eggs just about the Easter season. Therefore, people had a good supply of this commodity during this period of the year. And as Easter was a great occasion of joy and happiness, people started to put color on the eggs. They used to color them red to symbolize the joy occasioned by the victory of Christ.

This custom of egg coloring is found all over the Christian world, both in the East and in the West. Little by little the use of eggs assumed a symbolic meaning as well. The egg being a symbol of life, became a symbol of Christ's coming to life. As life comes out of an egg, in a similar way, Christ came to life out of His sepulchre.

2) The Easter Rabbit or Easter Bunny is entirely a Western custom and is unknown in the East. The rabbit is also a symbol of fertility and represents Spring rather than Easter.

3) Easter was celebrated for three days in the old country. The Monday and Tuesday following Easter Sunday were also days of rest and time for families to visit each other. Easter Monday, although it is a memorial day according to the Armenian Church calendar, was one of the most joyous days of the year. On this day the cemeteries were places of popular sports and picnics. The people used to eat their dinner near the tombs of their loved ones and invite all the poor people of the neighborhood to come and take part in their food and rejoicing. This was a kind of attempt to bring even to the departed souls the joyous spirit of Easter. It was also a popular way of expressing and celebrating the victory gained over death.

4) The Blessing of the House is another custom of Easter time. The parish priest visits the houses of the members of his parish and blesses them. Easter is the day for visiting one another and sharing and conveying the joy of the day. The priest is a spiritual member of each and every family of his parish. He must visit

all his parishioners on Easter Sunday, as a member of the family.

The priests in those days did not receive any set salary. They depended entirely on the free gifts of their parishioners. It was very natural for the parishioners to offer, on such a joyful occasion, a little gift to their priest to express their thanks and appreciation for the spiritual services that this humble servant of God used to give to the whole congregation without monetary recompense. It is most deplorable that in this material world of ours the spirit of things disappears faster and easier than the shell or body of them. But it is the spirit that gives life and significance to any custom. Once the spirit is lost, then the visible part also, little by little, loses its beauty and meaning and dies out. This is what is happening to this most meaningful custom of house blessing.

5) Another important custom taking of Holy Communion without fail. Together with right faith and good works, Holy Communion is a most important factor in making us worthy Christians. Easter will have little value, or no value at all, if we do not take Holy Communion. It is the duty and privilege of every Christian to partake at the Lord's Table at least on Easter Day. Christ will rise in our hearts on Easter Morning if we ourselves approach Him at the Altar with a clean heart and humility.

6) The traditional greeting of the Day is: "Christ is risen." The answer is: "Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ."

It is worthwhile to know that Easter occupies a central position among the days of the year, not only from the point of religious importance but also from the point of church-calendar making. When preparing a church calendar, the first thing a calendarist does is to find the date of Easter. With the exception of a few "immovable" holy days, all the other "movable" days take their place in the year according to the position which Easter occupies in the year.

The day of Easter is determined in accordance to the following rule: Easter is celebrated on THE FIRST SUNDAY following the FIRST FULL MOON following SPRING DAY, i.e. March 21. According to this rule Easter may occur on any Sunday between March 22nd and April 25. This rule was set at the famous Church Council of Nicea, in 325, which also formulated the Christian Creed, which is known as the "Nicene Creed."

This article is from *Saints and Sacraments* by Archbishop Shnork Kaloustian (Patriarch of Constantinople). Did you know it was available? (at the Diocesan Bookstore) Read it for more helpful information on the Armenian Church!



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