

THE EASTER SEASON

- Our Easter celebration of Christ's Resurrection does not end on Easter Sunday; it is only the beginning. The season of Easter continues for 50 days, or 7 weeks, after Easter Sunday concluding on Pentecost.
- On the Sundays of Easter, the first reading comes from Acts of the Apostles. In Year C, the second reading is taken from the Book of Revelation, and the Gospel is read from the Gospel of John.
- The color of Easter is white.

Divine Mercy Sunday (Second Sunday of Easter)

Scripture Readings: Acts of the Apostles 5:12-16; Psalm 118; Revelation 1:9-11a,12-13,17-19; John 20:19-31

Pope John Paul II gave the title of Divine Mercy Sunday to the second Sunday of Easter in the year 2000. In a homily he prepared for the first Divine Mercy Sunday, which was delivered posthumously, the Pope said, "To humanity, which at times seems to be lost and dominated by the power of evil, selfishness, and fear, the risen Lord offers the gift of his love that pardons, reconciles and opens the soul to hope. It is love that converts hearts and brings peace. How much the world needs to understand and accept Divine Mercy!"



The Divine Mercy devotion was popularized by St. Faustina Kowalska, a Polish nun who was beatified, then canonized, by Pope John Paul II in 2000. St. Faustina had related her vision of Jesus, appearing to her with streams of light emerging from his heart, asking that a feast be established after Easter in honor of the Lord's mercy.

Throughout the second week of Easter, invite family members to share their mercy and forgiveness with one another. Do Random Acts of Kindness for one another as well as for those with whom you work and for friends and neighbors.

Good Shepherd Sunday (Fourth Sunday of Easter)

Scripture Readings: Acts of the Apostles 13:14,43-52; Psalm 100; Revelation 7:9,14b-7; John 10:27-30



In the Gospel reading (John 10:27-30) of the fourth Sunday of Easter, Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me." + Thus, the fourth Sunday of Easter is designated as Good Shepherd Sunday.

On the fourth Sunday of Easter, the Church remembers that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Even though we are not sheep, we need to be shepherded, guided to make the right choices and do the right things. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus offers us his example, his words and his life, to guide us in our living.

As a parent, have you ever thought of yourself as a shepherd? Recall a time when you had to get your family ready to go someplace, like church, or had to gather them to return home. How did you feel through all of the activity? Perhaps like a shepherd?

Parents are told when their children are baptized that they are to be examples of God's love and mercy to them. Parents reflect God's love to their children. Their children come to know God first and foremost through their relationships with their parents. So it makes sense that parents are the shepherds of their families, guiding them as they learn to make decisions, leading them to God, protecting them from harm. Parents follow Jesus' example of the Good Shepherd whenever they guide, lead, and protect their families.

Psalm 23 is probably one of the most well known psalms. It is prayed at funerals, in times of need, and whenever someone simply wants to feel close to God. Share this exercise with your family, inviting members to share and discuss the images and feelings it evokes.

- « Slowly read all of Psalm 23 from your family Bible.
- « Then read each line individually, pausing to allow family members to reflect on the words of each line.
- « After each line, ask, "What images and feelings bubble up in your heart and mind as you read these words?"
- « Parents, as you read the psalm, put yourself in the place of the Lord and your children as the pray-ers of the psalm. What feelings does praying the psalm this way stir in your heart?

Ascension of the Lord

Scripture Readings: Acts of the Apostles 1:1-11; Psalm 47; Ephesians 1:17-23 or Hebrews 9:24-28, 10:19-23; Luke 24:46-53

Traditionally, the solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord was celebrated on the Thursday of the sixth week of Easter. In the United States, however, the Conference of Catholic Bishops designated that the Ascension of the Lord would be celebrated on the seventh Sunday of Easter.

The distinct celebration of the Ascension of the Lord was unknown in the first three and a half centuries. The chronology of dating the Ascension to 40 days after Lent exists only in the Acts of the Apostles. In the Gospel according to Luke, the Ascension appears to have taken place much earlier, even on Easter Day. The original ending to Mark's account of the Gospel did not include the Ascension at all, and it can only be inferred from Matthew's conclusion. When fourth-century Egeria mentions a celebration 40 days after Easter in Bethlehem, it may have been for the Holy Innocents. But by the fifth century, the observance seems to be universally accepted.

Pentecost

Scripture Readings: Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11; Psalm 104; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7,12-13; John 20:19-23



The Greek word for Pentecost (*Pentekostē*) means *fiftieth*, and in early Christianity it referred to the entire Fifty Days of Easter.

The color of Pentecost is red.

The roots of Pentecost can be found in the Jewish festival of Weeks (Shavuot), the 50-day celebration following Passover (Exodus 23:16). It was a harvest festival in which the first fruits of the harvest were offered to God in gratitude. It eventually became associated with the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

Early Christians reinterpreted the Jewish festival as a commemoration of the coming of the Holy Spirit, since Acts records that the Holy Spirit came to the disciples when the festival of Pentecost was fulfilled (see Acts 2:1-11).

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.

O God, who did instruct the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant us in the same Spirit to be truly wise and ever to rejoice in the Spirit's consolation. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessing of Homes during Eastertime

(from *Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers*, US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1989)

Families may take holy water from the baptismal font of the parish church to sprinkle in the home with this blessing.

All make the Sign of the Cross.

Parent: God fills our hearts and homes with peace. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

All: Now and forever.

Parent: Christ, risen from the dead, is our hope, joy, and comfort. May all who enter this home find Christ's light and love.

Child: Listen to the words of the holy gospel according to Luke:

As the two disciples and Jesus approached the village of Emmaus, Jesus gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, *Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.* So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, *Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?*

The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

All walk from room to room, praying these prayers of intercession and sprinkling holy water.

At the entrance:

Child: O God, protect our going out and our coming in. May we share the hospitality of our home with all who come to visit. May all who enter here know your love and peace. Grant this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

In the living room:

Child: O God, give your blessings to all who share this room, that we may be knit together in companionship. Grant this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

In the kitchen:

Child: O God, you fill the hungry with good things. Send your blessing on us, as we work in this kitchen. Make us ever thankful for our daily bread. Grant this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

In the dining room:

Child: Blessed are you, Lord of heaven and earth, for you give us food and drink to sustain our lives and make our hearts glad. Help us to be grateful for all your mercies and mindful of the needs of others. Grant this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

In the bedrooms:

Child: Protect us, Lord, as we stay awake. Watch over us as we sleep. While awake, may we keep watch with Christ and asleep, may we rest in Christ's peace. Grant this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

In the bathroom:

Child: Blessed are you, Lord of heaven and earth. You formed us in wisdom and love. Refresh us in body and in spirit, and keep us in good health that we might serve you. Grant this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Return to the living room or kitchen.

Parent: Be our shelter, O Lord, when we are at home. Be our companion when we are away. Be our welcomed guest when we return. And receive us into the dwelling you have prepared for us in your Father's house, where you live forever and ever.

All: Amen.

All make the Sign of the Cross as a parent concludes:

Parent: May the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, and may the word of Christ dwell in us, so that whatever we do in word and deed, we will do in the name of the Lord.

All: Amen.

Blessing of Seeds at Planting Time

(from *Book of Blessings*, Liturgical Press, 1989)

At the beginning of the planting season, it is customary for farmers to seek God's blessing on their crops. As the seeds are planted, God is asked to protect them from disease and destruction and to bring forth from them an abundant yield.

Pray this blessing as your family plants your garden and/or flowers around your yard.

Parent: *(as all make the Sign of the Cross)* In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen

Parent: Let us praise God, who plants the seeds and reaps the harvest. Blessed be God forever.

All: Blessed be God forever.

Parent: Today we seek God's blessing on these seeds/seedlings and the crops/flowers they will produce. Christ reminds us that, unless a seed is planted in the earth and dies, it will not yield fruit. As these seeds grow and are cared for, may they be signs of the new life that comes from God.

A child reads one of the following Scriptures from the family Bible:

≈ 1 Corinthians 15:35-39 . The seed you sow does not germinate unless it dies

≈ Genesis 1:27-31 . Creation

≈ Isaiah 55:10-13 . God gives seed to the one who sows

≈ 2 Corinthians 9:6-10 . God will increase the harvest

≈ Matthew 13:31-32 . Parable of the mustard seed

≈ Mark 4:26-29 . The seed and the kingdom of God

≈ Luke 12:16-21 . Be rich in what matters to God

≈ John 12:23-25 . Unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies

Litany

Parent or Older Child: The Lord of the harvest sustains us, let us call upon him:

All: Deliver us, O Lord.

Parent or Older Child: From despair in times of drought:

All: Deliver us, O Lord.

Parent or Older Child: From wastefulness in times of plenty:

All: Deliver us, O Lord.

Parent or Older Child: From neglect of those in need:

All: Deliver us, O Lord.

Parent or Older Child: From blindness to your presence in our work:

All: Deliver us, O Lord.

Parent or Older Child: From hunger and thirst:

All: Deliver us, O Lord.

Parent or Older Child: Remember us, Lord in your kingdom, and teach us to pray:



All: Our Fatherō

Prayer of Blessing

Parent or Older Child: Lord of the harvest, you placed the gifts of creation in our hands and called us to till the earth and make it fruitful.

We ask your blessing as we prepare to place these seeds/seedlings in the earth. May the care we show these seeds/seedlings remind us of your tender love for your people.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen

Parent: May God nourish us and care for us, now and forever.

All: Amen.