

A Guide to Easter

Rejoicing in the Resurrection

BY CLAIRE DWYER

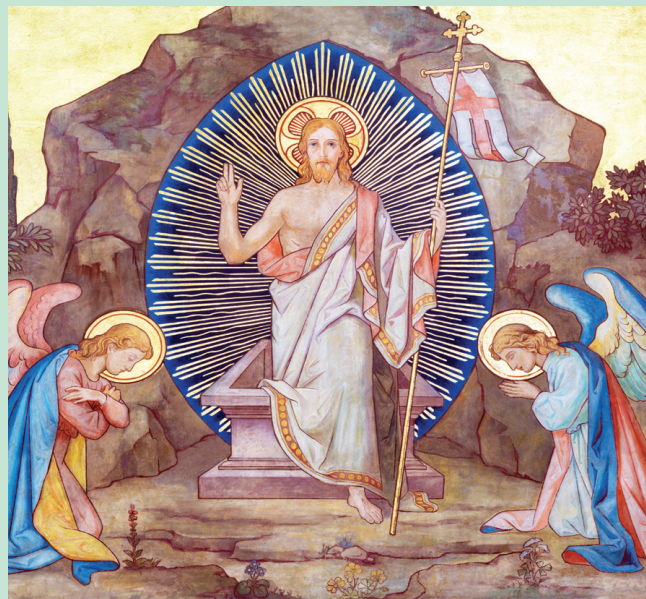
In the liturgical year, a solemnity marks the highest celebration of a central mystery of our faith or a saint of premier importance. **Easter**, the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, is the “Feast of feasts” and the “Solemnity of solemnities,” because it is the single greatest feast of the entire liturgical year and “fills the liturgical year with its brilliance” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1168). It illuminates all of our worship and is the center point of our faith: “... if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Corinthians:15-14).

The Triduum

The Church observes the three days leading up to Easter as the Easter Triduum, which begins on the evening of Holy Thursday and includes Good Friday and Holy Saturday. The celebration of Easter reaches its pinnacle at the dramatic Easter vigil, but a feast this momentous cannot be confined to a single day. The Octave of Easter lasts for eight days, until the Second Sunday of Easter. Even then, we continue the celebration for a full 50 days, until the feast of Pentecost.

“The 50 days from Easter Sunday to Pentecost are celebrated in joyful exultation as one feast day, or better yet, as one **‘Great Sunday.’**” — Congregation for Divine Worship, *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*

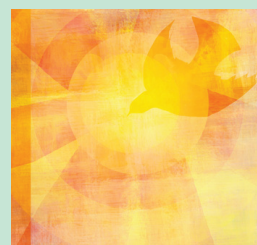
Additionally, every Sunday is a “**little Easter**,” and this is why Sundays are not included in the 40 days of Lent.



But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb; but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel; and as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.” — Luke 24: 1-5

Did You Know?

Easter is the “Christian Passover.” In most European languages, the word for the celebration of Christ’s resurrection is the same as the word used for the Jewish feast of Passover and is a derivative of the Hebrew *Pesach* (in Latin, *Pascha*). This is because Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament festival of Passover, the remembrance of God delivering his people. Through his passion, death and resurrection, he frees us from the slavery of sin and death. For this reason, Jesus Christ is called the “Paschal Lamb.”



What are the Easter Sacraments?

Baptism, Eucharist and confirmation are the three sacraments of initiation. Catechumens receive these sacraments as they enter the Church during the Easter vigil, but all the faithful have the opportunity to strengthen their own sacramental life by renewing their baptismal promises during the Easter liturgy.

Christ Is Risen!

The Paschal Greeting, or the Easter Acclamation, is an ancient practice still used in many places to this day. One person greets another with “**Christ is risen!**” and the other replies, “**Truly, he is risen!**” or “**He is risen, indeed!**”

Easter Proclamation

*O happy fault
that earned for us so great, so glorious a
Redeemer!*

*O truly blessed night,
worthy alone to know the time and hour
when Christ rose from the underworld!*

*This is the night
of which it is written:
The night shall be as bright as day,
dazzling is the night for me, and full of
gladness.*

— from the *Exsultet*, or Easter Proclamation,
sung at the Easter vigil

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.”

— John 11:25-26



Vigil of Light

The **Easter vigil** is the highest Mass of the liturgical year, featuring ancient and beautiful traditions that highlight the theme of light overcoming the darkness of sin and death. In the Roman Rite, the Easter vigil has four parts:

- The Service of Light
- The Liturgy of the Word
- Christian Initiation and the Renewal of Baptismal Vows
- Eucharist

The Paschal Candle

Lit from the Easter fire outside the Church, the Paschal candle is carried into a church immersed in darkness by a deacon who stops three times to sing “Light of Christ” (or *Lumen Christi*), to which the people respond: “Thanks be to God” (or *Deo gratias*). Gradually, smaller candles in the congregation are lit from this one candle, and the church begins to be illuminated. Then the *Exsultet* (or “Easter Proclamation”) is sung. The Paschal candle will remain in the sanctuary and be used for the entire Easter season and throughout the year at baptisms and funerals.



The Feast of Divine Mercy

On April 30, 2000, Pope John Paul II granted a new feast to the universal Church. With great joy, he declared that the Second Sunday of Easter would be celebrated as **Divine Mercy Sunday** as “an invitation to the Christian world to face, with confidence in divine benevolence, the difficulties and trials that mankind will experience in the years to come” (Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments).

This would fulfill the desire Jesus Christ expressed to the Polish nun **St. Mary Faustina Kowalska** during his apparitions to her in the 1930s, between the two world wars. “I desire,” Jesus told her, “that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depths of my tender mercy are open. ... It is my desire that it be solemnly celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter” (diary of St. Faustina, 699).

We not only receive God’s great mercy during this feast, we are to show it, as well!

“Yes, the first Sunday after Easter is the Feast of Mercy, but there must also be deeds of mercy, which are to arise out of love for me. You are to show mercy to your neighbors always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or try to absolve yourself from it” (diary of St. Faustina, 742).

“Mercy is the garment of light which the Lord has given to us in baptism. We must not allow this light to be extinguished; on the contrary, it must grow within us every day and thus bring to the world God’s glad tidings.”

— Pope Benedict XVI, homily for Divine Mercy Sunday 2007



Corporal Works of Mercy

- Feed the Hungry
- Give Drink to the Thirsty
- Clothe the Naked
- Shelter the Homeless
- Visit the Imprisoned
- Care for the Sick
- Bury the Dead

Spiritual Works of Mercy

- Admonish the Sinner
- Instruct the Ignorant
- Advise the Perplexed
- Comfort the Unhappy
- Bear Wrongs Patiently
- Forgive All Injuries
- Pray for the Living and the Dead



There are several **devotions** associated with the Divine Mercy, including:

- the Divine Mercy Chaplet
- the Divine Mercy Image
- the Hour of Mercy
- the Divine Mercy Novena, which begins on Good Friday and leads up to the Feast of Mercy
- the indulgence associated with the Feast of Divine Mercy: “I want to grant complete pardon to the souls that will go to confession and receive Holy Communion on the feast of my mercy” (Jesus to St. Faustina in her diary, 1109).

For more about these and other devotions to the Divine Mercy, including instructions and prayers, see EWTN.com/devotionals/mercy/index.htm.