

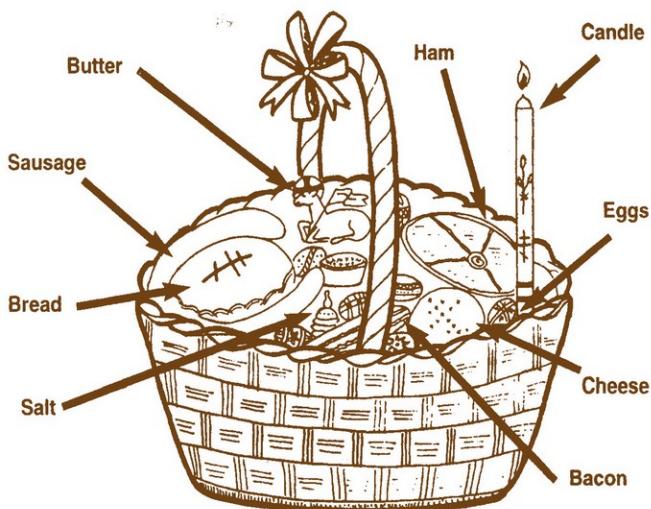
BLESSING OF EASTER BASKETS ON HOLY SATURDAY

The blessing of the Easter Basket containing the food for the first meal of Easter has been a beloved Catholic ritual for centuries among families of Eastern European origin. This tradition has since been adopted by people of all ethnic backgrounds, who enjoy its rich symbolism. On Holy Saturday morning, families prepare their Easter Baskets and fill them with symbolic items. The baskets are later brought to church to be blessed during a short service in the early afternoon. After Easter Sunday's Resurrection Mass, each family and their guests share their blessed fare and exchange good wishes.

The custom of blessing the Easter foods arose from the strict Lenten fasting of the past, when meat, eggs, fats, and other foods were forbidden during Lent. Easter was thus greeted with great joy as the day when Christ arose and when fasts were ended. The Church's joy and thanksgiving were expressed in this custom of blessing the foods for the first meal of Easter.

The Christian significance of Easter is symbolized in the items used and foods chosen for this special Easter tradition.

Baskets are lined with a **white cloth** and decorated with **ribbons, flowers, and greenery** to symbolize spring, renewal, and, of course, the Resurrection of Jesus.



Traditionally, the baskets are filled with:

decorated hardboiled eggs (representing Christ's Resurrection);

lamb-shaped butter or sugar (representing Christ as the "Lamb of God");

bread (reminding us that Jesus is the "Bread of Life");

meats, such as ham (symbolic of great joy and abundance), **sausage** (symbolic of God's favor and generosity), **smoked bacon** (symbolic of the overabundance of God's mercy), **or lamb** (representing Christ as the "Lamb of God");

salt (symbolic of prosperity and justice, and reminding us that we are "the salt of the earth"); **cheese**

(symbolizing the moderation Christians should have at all times);

horseradish, pepper, oil, and vinegar (symbolic of the Passion of Christ and the bitter herbs of the Passover); and

wine (symbolic of the Blood of the Lord).

The foods and other items contained in the family basket can be easily personalized, even including a sampling of any foods "given up" for Lent.

A **white candle** is often inserted into the basket to represent Christ as the "Light of the World."

Lastly, the **basket is covered with white linen**, to symbolize the shroud in which Christ's body was wrapped.

This long-honored tradition is both deeply symbolic and delightfully heart-warming. Children are eager to help prepare and decorate the family basket and proudly carry it into the church on Holy Saturday for the blessing. Some families prepare **specially decorated baskets for their young children**, filled with fruits, chocolate bunnies, or other treats to be blessed.

Holy Cross Parish invites you and your family to bring your unique family basket(s) to the church on Holy Saturday, April 20th, at noon for a brief blessing service.

Do come and share in this beloved custom with your parish family, or make this the start of a new Easter tradition with your own family, relatives, and friends!