

**Food Blessing from 1**

symbolic, colorful and generally appealing, it has also caught on with people non-Polish background who have been exposed to it.

Easter fare is usually brought to church in a wicker basket. In rural areas, larger baskets are common. In cities, smaller baskets with only a small sampling of the food are more typical. The święconka (as the Easter food basket is known) is lined with a linen napkin whose ends should extend beyond the basket's rim, so the Easter food can be covered while the basket is being carried to and from church. Here is what a typical święconka contains:

**Easter Lamb** (baranek wielkanocny): Usually made of butter or sugar (rock candy), but also of dough, wood, plaster, fleece or even plastic, the lamb with a usually red banner of Resurrection emblazoned with a gold cross (although other colors are also encountered) should go into the basket last, because in effect it watches over the remaining contents. ingredients. The baranek symbolizes the sacrificial Paschal lamb, in other words Jesus himself, whose banner proclaims the victory of life over death.

**eggs**, colored or plain (jaja, pisanki): Plain or colored eggs of one type or another are an absolute "must". The egg symbolizes new life. Just as a chick breaks open its shell, so too Christ emerged from his entombment to bring us the promise of eternal life.

**bread** (chleb): This is "our daily bread", the staff of life, as well as "the bread of life", a metaphor for the saving grace Christ has bestowed on mankind. Small round loaves of bread are specially baked to fit Easter baskets. They are usually marked at the top with a cross., meat & sausage (mięso, wędliny): It is customary to include a piece or coil of kiełbasa and a slice of ham or other Easter meats. All meats are symbolic of the Paschal lamb or Christ resurrected, His victory over death and His promise of eternal life.

**horseradish** (chrzan): Both plain, grated, prepared horseradish as well the well-known beet-horseradish condiment ćwikła may be included. Horseradish is one of the bitter herbs of the Passover which foretold the suffering of Christ on the Cross. It is also symbolic of life in which one must accept the bitter with the sweet.

**vinegar** (ocet): A small cruet of vinegar is often included in the święconka. It symbolizes the sour wine (from the French vin aigre = sour wine) which Jesus was given on a sponge to drink while hanging on the cross.

**salt** (sól): A salt-cellar, salt-shaker or a small paper cone containing a symbolic portion of salt is among the traditional contents of the Easter basket. Salt retards the spoilage of and adds flavor to food, hence it can be seen as symbolizing that which preserves us from corruption and adds zest to daily life. Some also include pepper whose preservative and flavor-enhancing role in food preparation is similar to that of salt.

**Easter cakes** (babka, mazurek, placek, sernik): Portions of babka and other Easter cakes are also traditional. Following the 40-day period of Lenten self-denial cakes and confections - symbolizing the sweetness of eternal life - can now be freely enjoyed in celebration Christ's Resurrection.

**wine and other spirits** (wino i inne trunki): Some but not all Poles (nowadays probably a minority) include a small decanter of wine or other spirits in their Easter basket. Its moderate use was sanctioned by Jesus at the Wedding Feast at Cana, and wine was raised to the altar at the Last Supper where Christ originated the Eucharistic sacrifice of the mass.

**box twigs** (gałązki bukszpanu): Boxwood, an evergreen shrub with tiny green leaves instead of needles, is used to decorate the basket.

The priest's Easter-food blessing goes

something like this:

Panie Jezu Chryste, Ty w dzień przed męką i śmiercią kazałeś uczniom przygotować paschalną wieszczkę, prosimy Cię, daj nam z wiarą przeżywać Twoją obecność między nami podczas świątecznego posiłku, abyśmy mogli się radować z udziału w Twoim Zmartwychwstaniu.

Chlebie Żywy, pobłogosław ten chleb i wszelkie świąteczne pieczywo na pamiątkę chleba, którym nakarmiłeś lud na pustkowiu. Baranku Boży, pobłogosław to mięso, wędliny i wszelkie pokarmy, które spożywać będziemy na pamiątkę Baranka Paschalnego. Pobogoslów także naszą sól, aby chroniła nas od zepsucia.

Chryste, Życie i Zmartwychwstanie nasze, pobłogosław te jajka, znak nowego życia, abyśmy doszli do wiecznej uczy Twojej tam, gdzie Ty żyjesz i królujesz na wieki wieków. Amen.

(Lord Jesus Christ, who the day before your passion and death, told your disciples to prepare the paschal supper, we implore You to let us in faith experience your presence amongst us during the festive repast that we might rejoice at taking part in Your Resurrection.

Living Bread, bless this bread and all holiday baked goods in memory of the bread with which You fed the people in the desert. Lamb of God, bless this meat and all the food we shall consume in memory of the Paschal Lamb. Bless also our salt that it may protect us from corruption.

Lord Jesus Christ, our life and Resurrection, bless these eggs, the sign of new life, so that we may attain Your eternal feast there, where you live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.)

The priest now sprinkles the food with holy water, while the faithful make the Sign of the Cross when their baskets get sprinkled. The ceremony ends with the priest extending cordial Easter wishes to his parishioners. □

**Yesteryear's Polish Easter from 1**

the faithful came to pray on Good Friday and Holy Saturday. Both Holy Thursday and Good Friday were a time to color Easter eggs, an activity once reserved exclusively for teenage girls and young married women.

The best-known and most popular Holy Saturday custom was and remains the blessing of Easter food known as Święcone (the blessed stuff). The typical święconka (Easter basket) contained a sampling of the food that would be consumed after Easter Sunday Mass at a festive family breakfast. Many youngsters could not wait to sink their teeth into that mouth-watering Easter fare but the Lenten fast would last until after Easter Morning Mass. They also staged a mock funeral for a pot of the sour gruel or żur and herring bones to express their distaste at these monotonous Lenten staples. Popular folk ditties indicated how greatly people looked forward to the rich Easter foods they would soon enjoy. One went: "Jedzie Jezus jedzie, weźmie żur i śledzie, kiełbasę nam zostawi i pobłogosławi." (Jesus is a-coming, He'll take the żur and herring; sausage he will leave us His blessing give us).

That long-awaited Easter morning finally arrived and the celebration began Rezurekcja, the special sunrise Mass of Resurrection, which usually began around 6 AM. It was said that any able-bodied individual who failed to attend did not deserve to partake of the festive Easter breakfast. First a procession encircled the outside of the church three times before the actual Mass got under way. Little girls strewed flower petals before the approaching Blessed Sacrament, borne by the priest processing beneath a canopy. Altar boys jangled bells and perfumed the early-morning air with that other-worldly

scent of incense, as the faithful followed in behind singing their hearts out: "Nie zna śmierci Pan żywota" and "Otrzyście już łzy, płacząc". Church bells, which had fallen silent on Holy Thursday, now rang out joyously, and the sounds gunshots and detonations could be heard in the neighborhood - a commemoration of the rumbling believed the have accompanied the opening of Christ's tomb.

Their souls were now in a state of sanctifying grace, but their bodies were starved after six weeks of rigorous fasting, so after Mass the faithful headed home in eager anticipation of all those delicious Easter treats. The breakfast began with grace and the sharing of wedges of blessed Easter eggs, accompanied by mutual well-wishing. There was a tart ryemeal soup known as żurek, hard-cooked eggs aplenty, and a variety of roasts, hams, loins, sausages, bacon, head cheese, black pudding (kaszanka or kiszka) and jellied pig's trotters and various nalewki (home-made cordials) to add zest to the feast. Following in behind were those superb babkas, placeks, mazurkas and cheesecakes.

Youngsters amused themselves with a game called walatka. A participant held an Easter egg and tapped it against that of a rival to see whose would be the first to crack. The one whose egg remained intact won and got the defeated player's egg as his prize. Another contest was the egg roll: Easter eggs were placed at the top of an inclined plank or a small hill and released. The one whose egg rolled the farthest was the winner.

Easter did not end the following Monday which was and continues to be a national holiday. That was the day boys were on the prowl for unsuspecting girls whom they would splash with as much water as possible. Every kind of bucket, jug, watering can or squirting device went into play. This was Lany Poniedziałek (Wet Monday) when the śmigus-dyngus custom was practiced.

Easter Monday was also the day Easter caroler-masqueraders would start their house-to-house trick-or-treating. A stingy householder who did not offer some treats or a few coins could expect to be doused with a bucket of water as he stood at the front door. In different parts of Poland different forms of Easter trick-or-treating were practiced. Boys went house to house carrying a figure of Jesus in a small garden or pulling a rooster cart. They would wish their neighbors all the best and entertain them with humorous verse and song. One of them went: "Easter caroling we have come, about Jesus we'll sing a song; about the Virgin and old Saint Pete, about bad Judas and the thief. Generous farmwife, if you please: give us vodka, bread and cheese."

To a large extent, the difference between Easter then and now is a question of active or passive participation: Are religious celebrations personally experienced or simply glimpsed on TV? Is it a home-made or a store-bought Easter?

In the olden days, people not only prepared all the food themselves from scratch, but also hand-crafted decorations to adorn the home and various ritual artifacts without which the Easter season was unthinkable.

Yes, our ancestors knew how to work, raise tight-knit families, worship God and amuse themselves. They sang, joked, enjoyed the various antics of Easter trick-or-treaters and knew how to practice what is now often called "the lost art of socializing". They may have been poorer in material terms, but spiritually and culturally weren't they richer? Even without Home Theater, Play Station 38 and all the other hi-tech gadgetry today's generation surrounds itself whenever it seeks entertainment or fulfillment! Maybe, just maybe we have lost something by falling into the commercial trap: "Just reach for your credit card, and we'll do the rest!" Maybe today's store-bought Easter is not all it's made out to be! □

**Taxes from 3**

deductible, even if you incur them when you're not sick. Examples include annual physicals, full body scans, and pregnancy test kits.

- Certain nonprescription equipment and supplies.** Medicine you buy without a doctor's prescription is usually nondeductible. However, items such as crutches, elastic hosiery, or blood sugar tests qualify as deductible expenses.
- Medical conferences.** If you, your spouse, or a dependent attend a conference relating to your chronic disease, the registration fee and travel expenses may be deductible.
- Nontraditional treatments.** Fees paid to acupuncturists, chiropractors, and therapists can typically be deducted if related to a medical condition.

If you have additional questions about the ideas mentioned here and/or the many other strategies available to you, they may be directed to me at 800-CPA-KROL (272-5765), or you may write to:

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