

Food Blessing from 1

plastic, symbolizes the sacrificial Paschal lamb, in other words Jesus himself, whose banner proclaims the victory of life over death.

– Easter eggs signify new life; just as a chick pecks its way out of its shell, so too Christ rose from His tomb to bring us the promise of eternal life.

– Bread, either a slice of ordinary rye bread or a special small round loaf imprinted with a cross, symbolizes “the bread of life” – a metaphor for God’s grace that sustains us.

– Meat and sausage are symbols of the Paschal lamb or Christ resurrected, His victory over death and His promise of eternal life.

– 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 symbolizes the sour wine (our English word “vinegar” comes from the French “vin aigre” – sour wine) which Jesus was given on a sponge to drink while hanging on the cross.

– Salt symbolizes that which preserves us from corruption and adds zest to daily life.

– Cakes and sweets suggest the sweetness of eternal life: following week’s of Lenten self-denial, they can now be freely enjoyed in celebration of Christ’s Resurrection.

Over the years, I have noticed how many baskets brought to Warsaw parishes for the blessing have become progressively smaller and more symbolic. Some święconkas are tiny wicker baskets that barely fit two or three eggs, a little sugar (rock-candy) lamb, a two-inch piece of sausage, a slice of babka and not much else. But in the Polish countryside, much larger baskets are common.

A similar phenomenon has also occurred in my home state of Michigan. Medium-sized baskets accommodating perhaps half a dozen Easter eggs and a similar quantity of other delicacies were typical in the Detroit area of my childhood. But I was in for a surprise in the late 1970s, when my family spent a couple of years in Bay City, Michigan, a hundred miles to the north.

There, some of the old Polonian families, tracing their roots to 19th century immigrants from the Poznań region, took the food-blessing custom quite literally, bringing to church most everything they planned to serve on Easter Sunday. I vividly recall one family that came with a large wicker laundry basket that included a whole ham, loads of kielbasa, a few dozen eggs, several coffee cakes and jars of beet horseradish as well as wine whisky and even a case of beer!

The blessed food or hallowfare is known in Polish as “święcone” (the consecrated things). The custom itself is known as “święcenie pokarmów wielkanocnych” (blessing Easter food) or “święcenie święconego” (blessing hallowfare). Święcone is also the name given to Easter breakfast which often turns into an all-day affair. In some cases, a Święconka table is set up in a private home and neighbors bring their hallowfare there to be blessed.

Nowadays the blessing is usually performed in churches. In nice weather, a table may be set up for that purpose outside the church. Traditional Easter foods – eggs, sausage, ham, bread, a butter lamb in Polonia and a sugar one in Poland, babka and such condiments as horseradish, salt, pepper and perhaps a cruet of vinegar – are brought to church for the ritual blessing. The officiating priest prays over the baskets and sprinkles them with Holy Water. It is customary to pray at the Lord’s Tomb and take home a bottle of freshly blessed Holy Water for the family’s home use, like when the priest pays his annual pastoral “kolęda” visit the following new year. □

Justyna Ball from 2

Europe of Jews returning to Germany and the reasons behind it.

Those supposedly highly qualified columnists, well known authors, “experts” on all social and historical issues, all concluded the same, Jews returned (or moved) to Germany for two reasons:

1) Because that’s where their roots were (ancestors are buried, etc).

2) Germans were bad but others were even worse.

And of course, the alleged ever-present “anti-Semitism” in Eastern (and Central) Europe was so high that no Jews wanted to ever return there. Those who stayed behind were robbed and we all know the rest. There are many who stayed, thank God, did well and are still doing fine (to prove the idiots wrong), but that “revelation” would destroy the myth...

But those “experts” are missing one important fact, which is actually the main factor...

Now, ask me why we don’t shop at Wal-mart? That’s right, we are Wal-mart free! Since June 2004!

The answer is simple, because it reminds us of the communist era’s state operated stores. We had them, The Russians had them, and theirs was called GUM. It destroyed all family operated businesses in the area. Whatever wasn’t confiscated died a natural slow death and the remaining few were doing just ok. Nothing spectacular.

Corporate America reminds my husband and me of communism in Poland so why would I support it then? When small businesses can’t compete with the “lowest” prices of big chain stores, the mechanism is the same.

You had to be blind not to see it coming. People wanted things cheap, they got them, but there was a catch... Are there any products made in the US left? Give me some, think, think... any? The things that people used to send to Poland all made in America were the pride of the recipient, always of the highest quality, are now in non-existence. That was written in very fine print so we missed it...

We let the retailers fool us. We allowed ourselves to believe that more (of the cheap stuff) is better. And now we’ll pay a high price for it. We thought we were so smart...

At some point, “Wal-mart” became the magic solution to all our problems and needs. All my girlfriends always came up with the same answer “I’ll buy it at Wal-mart,” “Wal-mart has it,” “You can get it cheaper at Wal-mart,” as if they were on their payroll.

It had to stop. Whatever happened to Ames, Zaire, Fair, Caldor, Lechmere, or Bradlees?

Gone, replaced by ... you guessed it! And when Wal-mart added the Super Food section, you didn’t need to shop anywhere else anymore. In Oxford, MA, it only took Wal-mart four days to come up with the idea of its own Food Store as an addition to the existing store after some supermarket chain decided to build its store nearby.

So now I’m back to the American “old days” way of shopping when the economy was built by immigrants and small businesses. I shop at my local hardware store operated by a local family, and I do not mind paying a little more, I’ll just buy less. They seem to be much more competent than anybody at Wal-mart ever was. And they know my name. And they smile and not just wear a smiley face on their pin. And we chat. Who would have thought that buying birdseeds, ant traps or even a plunger is a good conversation starter?

If in your area you still have some family operated business, support it as an endangered specie...

There are two options: 1) either those columnists, opinion makers, deep thought gurus do not understand the economic situation outside the US, especially in post

-war Poland, or 2) they do understand well but also know that the average American reader trusts its media. They may not trust political issues, but agree on others, as abstract as European history. Also if they knew the history of Jews in Poland (not the distorted version), they would know, for sure, that the main reason why Jews were there in masses (beside being kicked out from the West), invited by the Polish king, and what they maintained all those centuries was the ability to prosper as small vendors or big merchants, one of the country’s economic engines. Paradis Judeorum was “Jewish Paradise” nowhere else but in 17th century Poland. The Golden Age of Jewish history.

In 1945, having that ability taken away, replaced by the government-operated enterprise, not only crossed out Jewish but everyone else’s hope for good life in peace and prosperity.

Meanwhile over the wall, in Germany... Western not (!) Eastern that is... life was getting better and better, thanks to the Marshall Plan (that Poland was deprived of as Uncle Sam’s good intentions did not charm Uncle Joe), German capitalism went full steam ahead, sided with all the goodies of the free market. And Germany is the country that stirred up the war and the one that lost it. And Poland was supposed to be the “winner.”

But understanding requires thinking and some American “experts” seem to be lacking that concept (or logic). Why else would they call the Soviet brutal occupation and decades of Communist regime in Poland a “guardianship” as they do in the Smithsonian publication called “Human-Origins, body, mind, culture, peoples...” filled with 500 pages of human studies? It always starts with one stereotype, a myth and the rest follows but the finished product is more of an invention rather than a logical follow-up of arguments supported by facts.

Someone should have a scientific study of “American expertise.”

Being Jewish does not automatically make you an expert on the Holocaust. Many American Jews of the younger generation are influenced by Jewish and American authors who are openly prejudiced against Poles. Just as being American does not make you an expert on Polish history or specifically communism (as I said, many American “scholars” base their knowledge on repeated stereotypes) only because they claim Poles were lied to by their communist government. Sorry, I guess, over the decades we must have developed that extra sense of knowing when we are lied to. I wish all Americans did too.

Capitalism in the West, besides giving people a chance to become rich, and live comfortably also had another major “advantage” - those with money could influence those without. The rich could influence opinions of others by promoting their version of history. The winners write the history, and the winner with money can rewrite history to their satisfaction/needs, over and over.

To say that the communist government discriminated against the Jews is plain ridiculous. The streets were named after Jewish heroes, monuments erected one by one, and many started up their political careers in the communist government (a fact that the US passes on as a myth).

The notion that some Jews returned after 1989 because of the fall of the communist government that cost them a repression is also quite amusing. The so-called “revival of Jewish culture” in the US is presented as the changing of Polish attitudes toward Jews. Supposedly for what reason?

We all know that Poles are also returning, although, I guess this fact is not worth mentioning by the US media. Does it mean that the government somehow is more Polish friendly now as well? Did the sentiments toward them also change? Or

Lent and Easter in Polonia from 1

Americans observe the traditional Lenten and Easter customs of their ancestors? The Holy Saturday food blessing seems fairly widespread, but does anyone know how the traditional Lenten service known as Gorzkie Zale (Bitter Laments) has fared? How many parishes actually hold it and what is the attendance like?

What percentage of Polonians bother to create the intricate wax-inscribed “pisanki” Easter eggs or the etched “kroszonki” variety? On how many Polonian Easter tables is the butter lamb an absolute “must”? How many attend Rezurekcja, the early Easter Sunday mass that encircles the church three times before getting started? How widely is Dyngus Day celebrated, especially beyond Polonia’s two main Dyngus centers: Buffalo, NY and South Bend, Indiana? There have been some studies in the past, often focusing on local communities. But we will soon be a decade into the 21st century, and as far as I know nothing recent has been done on a national scale in this regard.

It is true that America is a pluralistic country, a land of immigrants from the far-flung corners of the globe. As such, we Pol-Ams have an opportunity to share our traditions with others as well as to partake of and enjoy the foods and customs of other lands. Widespread inter-marriage affecting Polonia and other group should be an opportunity to pass more than one ethnic heritage on to the next generation. This might include the lavish Polish and Hispanic Palm Sunday processions or such culinary treats as the Polish babka and the Italian columba (dove bread)? Unfortunately, all too often all that is passed on is the meaningless Easter-bunny and jelly-bean-style Easter. Even worse, some Pol-Ams complain of neighbors who wash their car or disturb the peace with their high-decibel power mowers. On Easter Sunday! □

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maybe they ALL return because the old system fell and now the new system welcomes investors because it is business friendly? Maybe it has nothing to do with the changing Polish attitude - it’s only in some columnist’s head that some strange theories are being created.

Polish Jews are doing quite well except that the American media doesn’t want the American reader to know about it. Another day, another myth - why complicate things when everything can be so black and white? The sociologists and historians, from this side of the globe will continue their thesis.

There were no Wall Streets in Eastern Europe - no rich clients to grab the money from.

People like Bernie Madoff could not have prospered in communism. Someone of even much lesser wealth would attract unnecessary attention. Unlike Americans, communists did not create Forbes’ Fortune 400 to brag about.

That’s why, the world’s famous sprinkler installer, the son of Jewish immigrants could only accomplish the world’s greatest scheme here in the US and not in his parents’ native country, Poland.

Sadly for the US, from being the number one country of opportunity, it became the “mecca” for opportunists. I know, I know...! I should be sorry for the victims who lost millions, but somehow I cannot force myself to do that! □