

### Mystagogia

Those who came to Christ during the Easter Vigil are not simply sent home to do their best after their baptisms and confirmations. They continue to gather during the Easter season, in a period called *mystagogia*.

During this time, they share their reflections on their deeper life in Christ through the sacramental life of his Church, and they continue to learn. In this way, they are like the Apostles, learning from their encounters with the Risen Christ and growing in faith and love.



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Many times, Jesus promised his Apostles that they would not be alone after he physically left them; he would send a helper — the Paraclete, the Spirit — to be with them, bind them in love, and empower them. He made this promise on the day he ascended into heaven, and after days of prayer in Jerusalem, the Apostles experienced what Jesus had promised.

Like a mighty wind and tongues of flame, the Holy Spirit came to the Apostles, giving those Jesus had chosen the strength and courage to witness in his name. With this, the Church was born.

Red is the liturgical color for Pentecost, recalling the flames of the Holy Spirit, and also reminding us of the sacrifice and martyrdom awaiting Jesus' disciples. Many parishes invite all those who gather for Mass to wear red on that day.



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### Bringing Easter Home

During the Easter season, we celebrate the healing, powerful life of the Risen Christ. What are some ways we can nourish that life beyond the church doors, in our daily lives?

- ✦ Draw closer to Jesus by receiving Communion some time during the Easter season.
- ✦ Celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, too.
- ✦ Try to let our spiritual lives be formed by the spiritual treasures of the entire Body of Christ: read the daily Mass Scripture readings, or learn to pray the Liturgy of the Hours.
- ✦ Remember and celebrate family members' baptisms and confirmations.
- ✦ Engage in our own personal *mystagogia*: do some spiritual reading or join a parish study group.
- ✦ Go out to the world and be his witness: get involved in RCIA; educate ourselves so that we can answer questions about our Faith.

### Sent Forth

The prayers, Scriptures, and liturgies of the Easter season give all of us a unique opportunity to deepen our faith in the Lord, as we celebrate God's victory over sin and death. Opening our hearts to his outpouring of grace and mercy, and to the presence of the Holy Spirit, we are united in love and strengthened like the Apostles to go forth as his witnesses to the whole world:

*The Resurrection is not a thing of the past; the Resurrection has reached us and seized us. We grasp hold of it, we grasp hold of the risen Lord, and we know that he holds us firmly even when our hands grow weak. We grasp hold of his hand, and thus we also hold on to one another's hands, and we become one single subject, not just one thing. I, but no longer I: this is the formula of Christian life rooted in Baptism, the formula of the Resurrection within time. I, but no longer I: if we live in this way, we transform the world.*

— Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, Easter Vigil, 2006

### For further information

Theresa K. Driscoll and Kelley L. Renz, *Catholic Faith Facts: Q & A for Lent and Easter*, 2006

Michael Dubruiel, *A Pocket Guide to Confession*, 2007

Fr. Benedict J. Groeschel, C.F.R., *Questions and Answers for Your Journey to God*, 2007

Scott Hahn and Mike Aquilina, *Living the Mysteries: A Guide for Unfinished Christians*, 2003

Fr. George Kosicki, C.S.B., *A Pocket Guide to Living the Divine Mercy*, 2008

Catherine M. Odell, *Faustina: The Apostle of Divine Mercy*, 1998

Karl A. Schultz, *How to Pray with the Bible*, 2007

Amy Welborn, *Here. Now. A Catholic Guide to the Good Life*, 2005

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## How to Celebrate the Easter Season



*“He has risen, as he said.”*

— Matthew 28:7

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## He is Risen!

From the empty tomb on that first day of the week, the women brought good news to the Apostles. It was *the* Good News of:

- ... hope.
- ... forgiveness.
- ... peace.
- ... eternal life.

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This is such Good News that Catholics celebrate Easter not just on a single day, but all year long, in different ways. We celebrate the Resurrection every Sunday, the “little Easter” of our week. We also celebrate it for the seven weeks of the Easter season, which is considered one single feast day, called the “Great Sunday.”

The Easter season lasts fifty days, beginning on Easter Sunday and ending on Pentecost Sunday. We celebrate Ascension part way through — forty days after Easter. Because the date for Easter changes every year, the dates for the other feasts do as well.

### The joy of the Easter season is reflected in our words:

- ✦ Two “Alleluias” are added to the dismissal at Mass: we hear *The Mass is ended, go in peace, Alleluia, Alleluia*, and we respond, *Thanks be to God, Alleluia, Alleluia!* “Alleluia” is also added to the ends of prayers and antiphons in the Liturgy of the Hours.
- ✦ In Eastern European cultures, it is typical to greet others with “Christ is risen,” to which the response is, “He is risen indeed!”

## What the Easter Season Is All About

In the days and weeks after the discovery of the empty tomb, the Gospels tell us that Jesus’ friends encountered him again and again: in Jerusalem, in Galilee, in a locked room, on a lakeshore. Jesus entered into their fear and confusion and shared with them:

- ◆ Peace and forgiveness.
- ◆ The power to forgive in his name.
- ◆ The invitation to deeper faith.
- ◆ A call to feed his sheep.
- ◆ A mission to baptize the whole world.
- ◆ The assurance of his presence with them always.

During the Easter season, as we listen to the Scriptures, pray, and share the Eucharist, we walk with the Apostles on this same journey with the Risen Jesus. Gathered together — perhaps first in fear and confusion — we, too, are assured by Jesus: he will be with us always; he is with us *now*; and we, as his Body, filled with the same Spirit that filled the new Christians in Jerusalem, have the same mission *now*.

### The light and life Christ brings into the world are reflected in the symbols of:

- ✦ The Paschal Candle, which is lit during the Easter Vigil and during all liturgies of the Easter season. After that, it is kept next to the baptismal font and lit at baptisms. It is also used at funerals.



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- ✦ The liturgical color of white, symbolizing the purity of our life in Christ and his glory.
- ✦ Easter lilies, which represent the beauty and glory of Christ.

During Lent, we walked with Jesus on the road of sacrifice, and now during Easter season, he meets us in glory. The most helpful way to open ourselves to the grace of this season is to make the Scripture readings that the Church proclaims and prays with during this season part of our lives, and to listen to the Lord speak to us through his Word.

The Easter season begins in a special way with the *Octave of Easter*, Easter Sunday and the week following it. These days are *solemnities*, meaning that the readings and prayers of that day take precedence over any saints’ feast days or other celebrations.

The Scripture readings for the octave are centered on the Apostles’ experiences of the Risen Jesus on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, on the road to Emmaus, and on a mountaintop in Jerusalem, as he sends them forth into the world in his name. When we make these Scriptures the center of our prayer, we join with tens of millions of Christians around the world, encounter Christ, with the Apostles, through the same Word, and then sharing his presence in the same Eucharist.

### Divine Mercy Sunday

In the year 2000, Pope John Paul II designated the Sunday after Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday. Rooted in Jesus’ words to St. Faustina Kowalska, a focus on the devotion of the Divine Mercy is fitting at this time, for it is in the sacrifice of Jesus that we encounter his mercy — his forgiveness of our sins — and during the Easter season we bear witness to the joyful and loving fruit of that Divine Mercy in our lives.

The Scripture readings of the Sundays of Easter help deepen our understanding of the new life Jesus promises.

As we listen to the Gospels on the first three Sundays, we stand with the Apostles in astonished joy as they encounter the Risen Christ. On the second Sunday, Divine Mercy Sunday, we relive Thomas’ experience of the Risen Lord. On the fourth Sunday, we hear the story of the Good Shepherd. On the last three Sundays, pas-



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sages from Jesus’ Last Supper discourses, related by John, call us to greater unity and love in Christ.

You will notice that during the Easter season, the first reading at Sunday Mass is always from the Acts of the Apostles instead of from the Old Testament. This gives us an opportunity to let the deep faith of the early Church in Jerusalem inspire us in our lives as disciples today.

Jesus shares his own life with us in our baptism. As we cooperate with that grace throughout our lives, we deepen that relationship so, as Paul says, “...it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).

The Easter season is a time to remember and celebrate our baptismal dying and rising to new life in Christ. During Sunday Mass, a renewal of baptismal promises may replace the penitential rite, and as a concrete reminder, the priest may sprinkle us with holy water. This is a wonderful opportunity to be strengthened in our relationship with Christ.

It is common for baptisms, first Communions, and confirmations to be celebrated during the Easter season. Prayerfully joining families and parishes in these sacraments is another wonderful way to grow in Christ.

## Ascension and Pentecost

Luke tells us in both his Gospel and its sequel, the Acts of the Apostles, that after Jesus had remained on earth with his Apostles for some time, he ascended into heaven.

Sometimes, we, like the Apostles, might be tempted to see the Ascension as a departure, but it is actually the opposite. Ascending into heaven, Jesus is now with all of us here, today — wherever we are. The words in Acts 1:11, addressed to the Apostles by two men dressed in white, are also addressed to us: “Why do you stand looking into heaven?” Like the Apostles, we can’t stand and wonder, for we have all been given a mission by Christ: “Be my witnesses . . . to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The whole Easter season is about mission, but these days in particular — Ascension and Pentecost — are especially so.