

OUTWARD SIGNS OF INNER GRACE

WASHING & CLEANING - A SIGN OF OUR BAPTISM

During Holy Week, give your house or car or garage a good Spring cleaning as an outward sign of an inward transformation: Wash curtains, turn the mattress, drain the hot water heater, clean out the fridge, sort your files, clean off your desk top, put a new picture on your computer screen. Wash and iron something from your closet to wear on Easter. Since we celebrate Baptism in the Easter night, every sign of transformation and renewal, of the "washed self" and the refreshed spirit makes sense at this time. Inner and outer meet in a simple, conscious action.



A GATHERING OF SYMBOLS

Easter Fire

Find a sturdy thick bees' wax candle and set it on a stand. Decorate it with fresh ferns and flowers if you want. The candle holds light for us and in so doing, gives up the life of its wax and wick. Watch how the room glows in candlelight. It flickers in the air currents and the little flame waivers and stretches as though it were pleading in our name to the God who made us.



We light a candle because it seems the candle helps us pray—prays along with us. This Easter candle reminds you of the candle given to you at baptism. It is a miniature of the great Paschal candle in the church. From the Easter Vigil, bring home the Easter fire in a protected jar to light this candle. We watched as the priest lit a fire from flint and flew the tender flame into life. Fire is one of our oldest gifts and one we cannot live without.

Easter Water

Find a beautiful little bottle with a lid or stopper. Bring it to the Easter Vigil and fill it with the Easter water which was blessed and used for baptisms. Use this water to bless your ceremonial foods, to bless each other, and keep it for times of need and thanksgiving.

Easter Bread

Bake a big round loaf of sweet bread filled with fruits and nuts to replace the "unleavened" bread of our Lenten fasts. You can bake it in a greased, tall tin so that the very shape of the loaf is high and tall: Resurrection bread. Surround it with eggs which you have dyed using red and yellow onionskins.

Easter Eggs

Take fresh, raw eggs and wet them with water. Take of collection of the dry papery skins of yellow and red onions that you collected from your produce man at the grocer and wet them down. With a square bit of hosiery, roll up the egg, surrounded by the wetted onionskins and wrap it tightly in the fabric

and tie both ends with twisties. If you want to press bits of ferns and flowers against the egg for a print of that plant, experiment with that, too. Put all your little bundles of eggs into a large cooking pot. Cover with water and boil slowly until the eggs are hard. Pour off the water. Cover with cool water. Unwrap the bundling around each egg and be delighted and surprised at the marbled effect of the onionskins and the print made by flowers. With a drop of salad oil on a paper napkin, shine each egg and place the eggs around the Easter Bread or in a basket of real straw.



Easter Tree of Life

Pick budding branches in the garden, pussy willows and flowers to make Easter bouquets to place around the house. Use a budding branch to make an Easter egg tree; from its branches, tie eggs which you have blown out and decorated. Eggs are a symbol of the resurrection and new life. For days, the egg looks lifeless and useless and then one day, there is the breakthrough of new life. The little chick pecks its way out of the shell and rises out of the tomb which was its egg.

Easter Clothing

Let the little ones hunt for eggs and chocolates in the house or garden. Fresh new clothing or the traditional "Easter Bonnet" comes from our instinct to "put on Christ" as we put on the white garment of our baptism. You don't need to have a whole new outfit – but wear some sign of new life and fresh beginnings. Sport a happy tie, a flower on your lapel, new socks – whatever works for you and for the family. Help each family member put together their Easter clothes and remind them this is in memory of their baptismal vows, which we renew in the night of the Easter Vigil.



Easter Sounds

Bells and glorious music return. Find a new CD of ancient sacred Easter music to play during brunch on Easter morning. Ring bells to wake the family that day and for the rest of Easter week. Someone in the family is sure to be happy to be the bell ringer.

Easter Feast

The Easter Feast breaks the fasts of Lent. During the day we have a ham or roast lamb – our best foods are prepared. Gather friends and family and people from your parish who would love to be included in a gathering. Ask everyone to bring their favorite traditional foods.

Gertrud Mueller Nelson



The eggs

The egg is a sign of new life and the breaking through from imprisonment to freedom. Ancient Egyptians buried an egg in the tomb with their dead. Ancient German people did the same as a germ of hope for a new life hereafter. Greeks, even today, put painted eggs on the graves of their loved ones.

Egg painting has always required a quiet sort of creative concentration, so as a group, we seem to be a muttering, exclaiming lot as we go about our work. With enthusiasm, we share a new technique or discovery here, and over there we check out what the other person is in such heavy concentration over. The process is by far more important than the product.

We paint symbols of the resurrection: the phoenix rising from fire and ash, flowers for a new springtime, fertile rabbits and new-hatched chicks. Then there is the "golden egg," the one egg on which is carefully inscribed Easter-in-one-word: Alleluia! This is the sought-after prize in the egg-hunt on Easter morning.

Some eggs can be dyed in food colors and then, with the aid of a toothpick dipped in household bleach, decorated with white-line drawings. Dab the extra bleach with a piece of paper towel. Bleach is not safe for use by small children, though, and caution must be used to protect clothing and table top. For little ones, use wax crayons to draw on the eggs before putting them into the food coloring. The wax lines will not dye.

Our very favorite way to color eggs is to wrap dampened skins of red and yellow onions around uncooked eggs and bundle them quite tightly into a small cloth or clean piece of hosiery. The more papery onion skins, the better. Tie the ends of the bundles with rubber bands or wire twists. Then bring the eggs to a slow boil and hard cook them. Unwrap them and they will appear wonderfully marbled.

The Easter basket of food

Dyed eggs, of course, are the centerpieces of the Easter basket of food for breaking the fast after the Easter Vigil or morning Eucharist. Different cultures have different Easter breakfast foods — from sausages to butter in the shape of lambs to chocolate candies of all shapes to jelly beans! In households that



would like to reduce the amount of processed sugar, there are creative ways to celebrate with fruits. I know of one family that delights in a beautiful basket delivered to their front door each Easter by an anonymous visitor. The basket is lined with a bed of crisp, fresh parsley. Nestled in this bed are the largest strawberries you could wish for.

The Easter breakfast table is a feast for the eyes as well as the stomach. In some Eastern European countries, this table is set and then replenished to welcome and feed guests all week.

Bringing home the fire

Bringing home the little flame from the great paschal candle in church, sometimes through drafts and rain, is an adventure! Fit a candle into a jar, and take this to church with you.

I remember a blustery rainy Easter in the Pacific Northwest. After the Vigil and the feasting, we trekked to our car in the rain, protecting our flame. Two young men approached. They had gone all the way to their car, only to have a slamming door extinguish their flame. They wanted to share again in our light and warn us to gently close the car doors! We shared our flame and crept into our car. Sure thing! As soon as we closed the door, our flame went out.

Well, the men were still there, waiting to see how we fared. Again, they shared the light with us and we had to laugh with joy at our fire-light fraternity. "Wow!" said one of our kids. "This fire is magic! You give it away, but don't lose it. It only makes more!"

Up and down the parking lot in the wind and the rain, we heard families laughing and calling out as flames went out and were rekindled.

At home, we bring this fire — struck from a tiny spark, sung to, honored, shared — to each dark room. Candles are lit, pilot lights renewed. In the fireplace, a roaring spring fire.

