



Paschal Season & Green Holidays



The fifty days between Easter and Pentecost have ever been considered by the Church as most holy. The first week, which is more expressly devoted to celebrating our Lord's Resurrection, is kept up as one continued Feast ; but the remainder of the **fifty days is also marked with special honours**. Christian tradition has assigned to Eastertide **two practices**, which distinguish it from every other Season.

One consists in **not kneeling, from Easter to Pentecost**. Instead we stand representing Christ rising from the tomb.
(See page 4 - Kneeling Prayers)

The Eastern Churches have faithfully kept up the practice, even to this day.

The other is, that Fasting is not permitted during the entire interval : it is an extension of the ancient precept of never fasting on a Sunday, and the whole of Eastertide is considered as one long Sunday. This practice, which would seem to have come down from the time of the Apostles, was accepted by the Religious Rules of both East and West, even by those most strict.

The Apostles have given so sacred an institution to these seven weeks that, during them, no one should kneel, or mar by fasting the spiritual joy of this long Feast.



Did You Know

In the Byzantine tradition, we still use the most ancient designation to refer to the Feast of Christ's Resurrection, Pascha.

Pascha is simply the Aramaic form of the Hebrew word for "the Passover." Thus Pascha would have been the word used by the Lord Jesus, the holy Theotokos, the illustrious Apostles, etc.

More importantly, when we refer to "Pascha," linguistically we retain the theological connection between Christ's Resurrection and Hebrew Passover. Passover is a commemoration of God's liberation of Israel from the slavery in Egypt.

Thus, ancient Israel's "passing over" from death to life, from slavery to freedom is the antitype and a historical instance recapitulated in Christ's own "passing over" from death to everlasting life, his liberating of sinners from death and the redemption of the souls from Hades.

The royal doors are kept open throughout the entire Easter week to symbolize that the gates of Heaven have been opened to all faithful believers. During Easter week and on Sundays until Ascension, the priest blesses the faithful with a cross. The Resurrection troparion is sung before and after each service.



GREEN HOLIDAYS

The conversion of the Eastern Slavs by St. Vladimir the Great in 988 AD didn't result in the Slavs' abandonment of the old beliefs for the teachings of the new religion.

Accordingly the Church implemented the tried and true remedy of pulling Satan's fangs by directing its charges' attention away from the old ways to the requirements of Christianity.

In short, the old ways were infused with Christian meaning and tied to **three feast days of the Church**.

The Slavic festivals associated with spring and summer and the sowing of crops coincided more or less with the **Remembrance of the Dead, Pentecost and Holy Trinity**.

In time much of the old heathenish belief system yielded to Christianity. In consequence new customs, derived from the old, took form and persist to this day.

Green Week begins on the Thursday before Pentecost. On this day, the girls in the village go into the fields to gather branches and flowers for weaving wreaths in memory of all the saints.

Green Saturday is the Saturday of Remembrance of the Dead immediately preceding Pentecost Sunday. On this day the faithful visit the graves of their ancestors and pray for the repose of their souls and their release from their sins. Flowers, wreaths and green branches, all representing life and the liberation from death (resurrection) are used not only at the grave sites but also to decorate the homes and churches. This is the origin of decorating the churches on Pentecost with green branches.

Traditionally people leave vodka or other alcohol and something to eat along with it, such as a piece of bread or candy. It is considered a good sign to find that the food and drinks have disappeared upon your next trip to the cemetery!

Green Sunday, also **Pentecost** and **Holy Trinity** are the combined feast days of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Trinity. Interestingly, the iconography of the day refers only to the descent of the Holy Spirit in form of tongues of fire on the heads of the Apostles.

In the Western Roman Church the vestments of Pentecost are red as tongues of fire, while those of the priests and deacons of the Eastern Church are green in acknowledgement of the overwhelming preoccupation of the Eastern Slavs with life, their lives, the success of crops and the well being of livestock, and by extension, the lives and resurrection of those who had passed on before them.

Thus, when we decorate our churches on Pentecost, Trinity Sunday or Green Sunday with green branches of trees and shrubs, we acknowledge the beliefs and customs of the Slavs who infused into the religion of Byzantium new meanings to edify and enlighten our minds and to beautify our rites.

Green is the color of spring and summer, the color of life, and life is an attribute of the Holy Spirit, “the Lord and giver of Life” who animates us all.

THE KNEELING PRAYERS

Three "Kneeling Prayers" are done during the Vespers of the Monday after the Great Feast of Pentecost on the evening of the Great Feast of Pentecost.

The "Kneeling Prayers" ask the Holy God the Son within the Holy Trinity / Our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ to send the Holy God the Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity upon us, to empower us to do His will in all aspects of our lives.

These prayers are called "Kneeling Prayers" because they mark the first time we kneel after the 50-day celebration of the Feast of Feasts, Holy and Glorious Pascha.

Kneeling is suspended during this 50-day celebration.