

## Thoughts for an *Extraordinary* Paschaltide

**Name:** The English “Paschaltide” and “Pasch” are derived from the Greek “Πάσχα” [Pascha], which is a transliteration of the Aramaic “פֶּסַח” [Paskha], which in turn is derived from the Hebrew “פֶּסַח” [Pesah or Pesakh] (in English “Passover” or “Passage”). The Latin name “*Pascha*” is a Latinization of Greek. “פֶּסַח” is the name of the Jewish feast which recalls how the blood of sacrificed lambs protected the Hebrews from the death of the firstborn inflicted by God and also their departure from Egypt. As the Epistle for Easter Sunday (1 Cor 5:7) and the Easter Preface indicate, Christ, Who “passed-over” from death to life, is our Pasch, the Lamb sacrificed for our deliverance and by Whose Blood we are saved. For this reason, the Christians adopted this as the name for their Feast of Feasts, the Resurrection of Christ. Our word “Easter” could originate from the Anglo-Saxon name of a pagan goddess of spring and her month (which we call April) or it could be from the Saxon “*Oest, Oost*” (“rising” or the “east”) and hence, “*Osteren*,” “the Resurrection.”

Paschaltide ends with the end of the Octave of Pentecost. The word “Pentecost” is derived from the Greek “Πεντηκοστή” [pentekoste], which means 50th, and was a name of the Jewish season which lasted for 50 days starting on the day after the Sabbath after the Passover (see Lev 13:15-16). The Latin name for this Feast is “*Pentecoste*,” a transliteration of the Greek. Pentecost is also known as “Whitsunday” and the time from Pentecost Sunday to Pentecost Saturday is known as “Whitsuntide.” The origin of the name “Whitsunday” is disputed, but it may be in reference to the white garment worn by the Neophytes (newly Baptized) during the Octave of Pentecost. Thus Pentecost Sunday would be called “White Sunday,” and thus “Whitsunday.”

**When is Easter Sunday Celebrated?:** According to ancient tradition, Easter Sunday is to be celebrated on the first Sunday following the first ecclesiastical full moon after the ecclesiastical vernal equinox (21 March). The Roman Church claimed for the foundation of this observance the authority of Sts. Peter and Paul.

**Division and Themes of Paschaltide:** Paschaltide (in Latin “*Tempus Paschale*”) has three major divisions, namely:

- “*Tempus Paschalis*” (“the Time of the Pasch”): from the Easter Vigil, including Easter Sunday (*Pascha*, also “*Dominica Resurrectionis* / the Sunday [Lord’s Day] of the Resurrection”) and the Octave (the “*Festa Paschalia* / the Paschal Feasts”), to the start of Ascensontide. The themes of this period are: Christ’s Resurrection, the redemption won for us by Him, His post-Resurrection appearances, His final preparations for His Church, re-creation and the 8th day, Baptism, and the Neophytes.
- “*Tempus Ascensionis*” (Ascensontide): from First Vespers of the Ascension up to the start of Whitsuntide. The themes of this period are: the Ascension of Christ into Heaven and the expectation of the coming of the Holy Ghost.
- “*Tempus Pentecostes*” (Whitsuntide): Pentecost, including its Vigil, and its Octave. The themes of this period are: the coming of the Holy Ghost upon Mary, the Apostles, and the Disciples, the public manifestation of the Church, Baptism, Confirmation, and the Neophytes.

The period after the Octave of Pentecost is known as “the Time after Pentecost.” This period represents the current age, the Age of the Church governed by Spirit of God. The 24th and Last Sunday after Pentecost liturgically presents the end of the World and the Final Judgement.

**Length of Paschaltide:** There are 40 days (inclusively) from Easter Sunday to the Ascension and 50 days (inclusively) from Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday. The total length of Paschaltide, from Easter Sunday to the end of Whitsuntide is 56 days (inclusively).

**Symbolism of the Length:** The 50 days from Easter to Pentecost can be seen as one continuous feast and thus a sign of the eternal feast which the blessed enjoy in heaven. The number 50 calls to mind the Jewish Jubilee which was celebrated every 50th year. In the Jubilee Year, land-property returned to its original owners and those who had sold themselves into slavery were set free. This was a foreshadowing of the Christian Jubilee in Christ as Christ redeemed us from the slavery of the tomb and restored us to the inheritance of our immortality. Additionally, there are 7 weeks from Easter until Pentecost, with Pentecost itself being in the 8th week. Seven, which symbolizes completeness, is raised to 8, which symbolizes a plentitude or super-abundance, here meaning the plentitude and super-abundance of the Law of Grace over creation (which was completed in 7 days) and the Old Law. The same symbolism can be applied to Easter Sunday (and all Christian Sundays). Easter Sunday is the 8th day as it is the day after the Sabbath, which is the 7th.

**Gloria?:** Yes, the *Gloria* returns during the Easter Vigil as an expression of our joy.

**Alleluia?:** Yes, the *Alleluia* returned to us during the Easter Vigil. Until the end of Whitsuntide, the presence of the *Alleluia* is super-abundant, both in the Masses and the Office. This is symbolic of our rising to new life with Christ from the tomb, of the glory of His victory over death and sin, and of the future happiness that awaits us in heaven.

**Liturgical Colors:** The liturgical color of the season from Easter until the Vigil of Pentecost is white. White manifests the Resurrection, which is the mystery of eternal light, which knows neither spot nor shadow. White also represents the purity and joy produced by the

Resurrection in faithful souls. Red is the color for Pentecost, which represents the Holy Ghost, the consuming fire, Who came down in the form of fiery tongues on Pentecost.

In the Time after Pentecost, the color of the season is green. Green symbolizes the growth that we are to make spiritually by reflecting on the mysteries we have been celebrating and contemplating, and will continue to contemplate, until the end of the liturgical year. It also expresses the hope of the Bride, the Church, who knows that she has been entrusted by her Spouse to the Holy Ghost Who will lead her safely to the end of her pilgrimage.

**Proper Masses and Preface?:** There are Prefaces proper to the three divisions of Paschaltide: the Easter Preface, the Preface of the Ascension, and the Preface of the Holy Ghost. Each brings to our attention the mysteries of the different periods. All of the Sundays, the days of the Octaves of Easter and Pentecost, and the Ascension have proper Masses. On ferias after the Ascension, the Mass of the Ascension is said (but without the Creed or proper *Communicantes*).

**Symbolic Time of the Easter Vigil?:** The Easter Vigil, and particularly its Mass, represents the early morning of Easter Sunday, specifically the “Resurrection Hour,” the time of Our Lord’s Resurrection from the Tomb. The *Pax* is omitted during the Easter Vigil because it was late on Easter Sunday that Christ greeted the Apostles with His greeting of peace, not early in the morning (which time the Vigil represents). For the same reason, only incense is carried during the Gospel procession of the Easter Vigil Mass. The incense represents the myrrh-bearing women arriving at the Tomb, while the lack of candles symbolizes their lack of faith in the Resurrection.

**The New Fire?:** The New Fire is blessed at the start of the Easter Vigil. The brazier (fire pit) outside the church represents the Tomb outside of Jerusalem. The new and blessed Fire represents the Lord’s Resurrection. The spread of the New Fire represents the preaching of the Gospel and the dispelling of darkness.

**Paschal Candle?:** The Paschal Candle, before being lighted, represents both the Pillar of Cloud and the lifeless Body of Christ in the Tomb. After being lighted, it represents the Pillar of Fire and the glory of Christ risen from the grave. The Pillar of Fire by night and the Pillar of Cloud by day guided the Hebrews for 40 years in the desert. The Paschal Candle is lit with fire from the New Fire. For the 40 days from Easter to Ascension, the Paschal Candle is the symbol of the presence of the Risen Christ among us. It is extinguished after the Gospel on Ascension Thursday and then removed after Mass to symbolize that the Church is now deprived of Christ’s physical presence.

**Baptism:** It is important to keep in mind that the Catechumens were solemnly baptized during the Easter Vigil. Additionally, those who, for whatever reason, were not baptized then would be baptized during the Vigil of Pentecost. With this in mind, one can understand several practices of this portion of the liturgical year. For example: the many lessons of the Vigils. Formerly, while these lessons were being read, the rite of Catechization, which took a considerable amount of time, was administered to the Catechumens. That Baptism was/is administered during these Vigils also makes it clear why the Church chooses these days to solemnly bless Baptismal Water. (Note: Due to the liturgical changes in the 1950s, the Lessons and the blessing of Baptismal Water at the Pentecost Vigil were suppressed, but recent permissions have allowed these practices to be revived in certain places.)

**Veiled Images?:** The unveiling of the images during the Easter Vigil shows how the Saints follow Christ into glory.

**Organ, Bells, and Flowers?:** The organ, bells, and flowers return during the Easter Vigil. They express the joy of the season.

**In Albis?:** The Saturday and Sunday after Easter are called respectively “*Sabbatum in albis [deponendis]*” and “*Dominica in albis [depositis]*.” This Saturday, following Vespers, the “white robes” (*albis*) “ought to be taken off” (*deponendis*) by the Neophytes. They had been wearing these robes, which they received at their Baptism at the Easter Vigil, during the solemn liturgies of the Octave of Easter as an emblem of the purity of their souls. This Sunday is given its title because on this day the Neophytes assisted, for the first time, at the full liturgies wearing their ordinary clothes, the “white robes” (*albis*) “having been taken off” (*depositis*). This Sunday after Easter is also called “Low Sunday.” This name was possibly given to indicate the contrast between it and the great Easter festival immediately preceding, and also, perhaps, to signify that, being the Octave Day of Easter, it was considered part of that feast, though in a lower degree. It is also called “Quasimodo Sunday” from the Introit (entrance chant).

**Blessings?:** In the Ritual, there are blessings proper to or fitting for Paschaltide, such as those for houses, eggs, and lambs.

**Rogation Days?:** On the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before the Ascension, the Lesser Litanies can be celebrated. On these days, there can be a petitionary procession, in which fields are blessed, which is then followed by a violet petitionary Mass (the Rogation Mass, from the Latin “*Rogare*” which means “to ask, to ask for”). Originally instituted in France (Vienne) for deliverance from calamities, the practice eventually became widespread. Their location on the Church’s calendar expresses how the joys of Easter are mingled with the sadness that these are the last days of Our Lord’s (liturgical) physical, risen presence among us.