

Logistics: Planning Holy Week and Pascha at Home

March 31, 2020 · [Elissa Bjeletich](#)

This year, we will almost surely be at home for Pascha — but Christ does not rise from the dead, trampling down death by death, because we are in church; He rises from the dead because He is the Son of God, and neither virus nor plague will change that! Christians have celebrated the Resurrection in [prisons](#), [concentration camps](#) and [gulags](#). They have prayed in the unlikeliest of “chapels”, under trees and in barracks, and they have scrambled for supplies, turning bedsheets into vestments and tin cups into chalices. Indeed, as they whispered memorized prayers and used their resources to imaginatively re-create the church experiences their hearts remembered, they have sometimes found that these are the most profound Paschas, that God sends the deepest joys when we need them most, and when our praises and worship are not easy but require effort and imagination.

With that in mind, let us embrace for this year a different sort of Pascha, one celebrated more quietly at home. We have a few weeks to prepare. Clearly, there is the question of whether you will read services at home (and making sure you’ve located the texts of those services) or whether you will attend some sort of online or live-streamed service, from your parish or another. (Note that Ancient Faith Radio is now offering [live streams from five](#) different churches and monasteries in North America, and, God willing, will live stream Holy Week and Pascha services.)

We can use these weeks to procure the items we’ll need to make Holy Week & Pascha feel *right*, to feel familiar and real. Think about the various days and services that mean something to you and your family. What are the events, sights and objects that matter to you? Are there ways to approximate them at home, or at least to remind us of the originals? The Orthodox Church understands that human beings worship with all five senses, so our churches are filled with music and with icons and with incense and candles... our bodies hear the chanting and smell the incense, and we are called to mindfulness and worship. We light the candle, and our bodies know that prayer is dawning. Let your services at home bring in your senses as the services in church do — stand before your icons, light your candles, burn your incense. And for Holy Week and Pascha, plan ahead to have those items on hand which will conjure up the culmination of all the Holy Weeks and Paschas we have celebrated.

These are some ideas for supplies you might consider having on hand. You may have other ideas, based on your own family’s experiences and traditions. Please comment below with any additional ideas you might have — we could all use some help with this very unfamiliar new project!

As Holy Week and Pascha come closer, note that we will continue offering our [Virtual Sunday School](#) at *Tending the Garden of Our Hearts*, with videos and ideas for activities and printables. There will be online resources galore — but for the physical objects you might want in your home, you'll want to plan ahead.

Lazarus Saturday:

Lazarakia

These little cookies which look like Lazarus all bundled in his graveclothes (does that sound awful? it really looks cute!) are a wonderful Greek tradition for Lazarus Saturday. You could make them as [traditional sweet bread rolls](#), or you could make them out of clay or play dough!

Storytelling

In my home parish here in Austin, we usually have a big children's day on Lazarus Saturday — liturgy followed by a lenten pancake breakfast with palm folding, and then the teens perform a skit about Lazarus. The skit follows the story, as Christ comes to Bethany and raises his friend from the dead, and then the townspeople (all of our kids) take palms in hand and process to the church, to Jerusalem, calling out "Hosanna in the Highest" to act out the Palm Sunday. We may well do a skit or puppet show here in the house — perhaps now is a good time to think about ordering puppet supplies, like felt and popsicle sticks. (Note: we would wrap "Lazarus" in toilet paper for graveclothes... such an extravagance is hardly imaginable this year!)

Palm Sunday:

Palms or Pussywillows

We're going to need palms or pussywillows, or something like them. What grows in your neighborhood?

If you can find something like long, thin palm leaves (perhaps even a wide, tall blade of grass?), you could [fold Palm Crosses](#)! If you are pretty dextrous and ready for a challenge, consider making some of the [fancier Coptic designs](#).

Bridegroom Services:

Oil Lamps

The story of the ten virgins waiting with oil lamps is a beautiful focus point of the Bridegroom Services that open Holy Week. Each person must supply their own oil (signifying loving deeds and merciful actions — *I can't give you my oil, because I cannot give you my experiences, my history of behaving in a Christian way*) so why not make oil lamps? These can burn throughout Holy Week and Pascha, and become the source or the repository for the “Holy Light” with which we light our candles on Pascha! You can use any sort of jar or container, but you’ll need either [candle wick and wire](#), or [wick floats](#) — so you may need to order or purchase ahead of time. It’s possible that you already know someone who uses oil lamps and has a stash of wicks, who can drop some on your porch before Holy Week.

Holy Wednesday:

Holy Unction

The sacrament of Holy Unction cannot be performed at home, but anyone can anoint another person with holy oil and say a prayer for their good health! After your services on Holy Wednesday, consider anointing your family before your icon corner. You’ll need holy oil — if you don’t have any, you can order it from any monastery or church with a healing icon or relics. (Oil from the vigil lamp over St. John Maximovitch’s relics is very popular, and you can [ask the Cathedral](#) in San Francisco to send you some.)

Alternately, you could [make your own sweet smelling oil](#) by adding a scent to olive oil.

Holy Thursday:

Mystical Supper

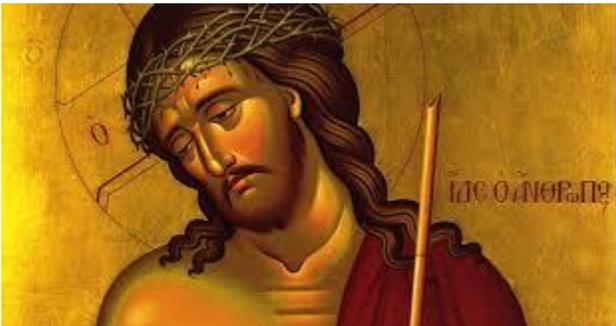
On this day, we commemorate the institution of the Holy Eucharist. Perhaps we could bake prosphora with our families to mark it, and to enjoy the familiar taste of church (without the sacrament, of course). In addition to flour, salt, yeast and water, you will want a prosphora seal (if that's possible. It's ok if it's not.)

Foot Washing

Very often, on Holy Thursday a priest will wash his altar boys' feet in remembrance of how Christ washed the feet of His apostles. What if the parents washed their children's feet? What if the children washed each other's feet? All you'll need is a basin or bucket, soap, and towels, as well as a kitchen chair on which the person can sit.

Service of the Twelve Gospels

From this service through the Descent from the Cross, display a cross prominently in your icon corner or where you are doing services together. You might use a cross you have on hand, or you might consider building a larger one yourself. Think of the large cross at church on which an icon of Christ can be hung — what if you mounted or positioned an icon of Extreme Humility or of Christ Crucified on that cross? (You could print one from online or find one in an old calendar, perhaps.) You could place this icon on your cross when (in the gospel readings) Christ is hung on the cross, and then remove it when He descends, placing it in His tomb — just like we do in church.



As you pray this service yourself or alongside a live-stream (or simply read the twelve gospel readings together), consider doing something to mark each reading, whether lighting a candle or laying a flower at the foot of the cross, or both.

Holy Friday:

The Tomb

On Holy Friday, we decorate a tomb with flowers and then place the icon of Christ inside it, marking the time He spent in the tomb. What if we were to cut large windows in the sides of a cardboard box (leaving the corners as pillars to hold its shape), creating a cardboard tomb? We could decorate it with flowers that we have collected outside, or with flowers that we've made from tissue paper or construction paper. Then we can use the tomb throughout the weekend, just as we do in church.

Descent from the Cross

If you have Christ's icon on a cross, you'll want to take Him down during this service, and wrap Him in white linens, as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus did. A white sheet or pillowcase would work well for this. Place (the icon of) Christ in His decorated tomb.

Lamentations

You'll want candles for everyone on Holy Friday evening, if possible. If you still have some of the wax catchers you've used in the past, you could reuse them, but if not, consider making some by cutting an X in the base of a disposable cup or small paper circle and pushing a candle through.

On Holy Friday evening, we process with Christ in His tomb (rather like pallbearers at a funeral), heading outside with our candles. Consider carrying the tomb and singing the hymns around your home, whether outdoors or indoors.

Holy Saturday:

The Proto-Anastasis, or First Resurrection

To celebrate the harrowing of Hades, why not throw bay leaves around your house as you sing *Arise O God!* If you cannot get bay leaves, any leaves will do, as the leaves are intended to signify life, as Christ tramples down death by death.

Dye your eggs! If you have saved up your onion skins, you can make the [traditional red eggs](#), but if you have no onion skins, using an artificial red dye is fine too.

Prepare your family's traditional Pascha foods, teaching your children the family recipes you hope they'll carry forward into their own homes.

Pascha:

The midnight services

Be ready with candles for everyone. If you still have some of the wax catchers you've used in the past, you could reuse them, but if not, consider making some by cutting an X in the base of a disposable cup or small paper circle and pushing a candle through.

When you light the candles, let one person light theirs first and then pass the light to one another, as we do in church.

Head outside with your candles and announce that Christ is risen! Make large crosses the air with your candles and call it out many times, as you would do at the Paschal church service.

Teach your children the Paschal Sermon of St. John Chrysostom if they don't know it already, so that they are ready to call out their responses when you read it aloud.

Feast with all of your family's favorite foods for breaking the fast, and crack your red eggs!

Agape Vespers

Read the Gospel reading in various languages if you can — or find a video of someone else doing that on YouTube!

Sing *Christ is risen!* in various languages.

For the following forty days, be sure to sing "Christ is risen!" at mealtimes and prayer times, and all the time, so that you can truly feel the resurrection in your home throughout the Paschal season.