What's Cooking for Pascha?

By Georgia Zeedick

Slavic people everywhere will be taking baskets loaded with holiday foods to church for the traditional Paschal blessing which is a *must* prior to eating those exquisite foods.

Neatly arranged in the baskets will be *sunka* (ham), *slanina* (bacon), *chrin* (beets with horseradish), salt, *pascha*, *kolbassi*, *hrudka* (*sirets*), butter, *pysanki* (ornately decorated eggs for decoration), colored eggs for eating, and *kolachi*. Some people may add candy and a bottle of wine (or other items of Lenten sacrifice) to their baskets.

After the foods are placed in the basket, an embroidered cloth cover is placed over them and a blessed candle is fastened upright near the basket handle.

For the first-timers who have never put together a Paschal basket, let alone prepared foods for it, the whole process can be mystifying. Every cook has his or her favorite way of preparing these foods and of measuring the ingredients for them, and asking for recipes can result in confusion.

To take some of the mystery out of the preparation of the traditional foods, here are a few recipes gleaned from my own experience and a few Slavic cookbooks.

Hrudka (Sirets) _____

1 doz. eggs
1 or 2 tsp. vanilla
1 qt. milk
½ cup sugar

Combine all ingredients in a white enameled pan. Cook over medium to low heat, stirring constantly, until mixture curdles. Pour mixture into a colander that is lined with several thicknesses of cheesecloth. Once mixture is drained, pick it up, cheesecloth and all, and shape into a ball by twisting the top part of the cheesecloth. Tightly tie open end with string, placing string very close to top of ball. Caution: This will be hot. Hang over sink until cool. Remove cheesecloth when cool; wrap and refrigerate. (The whey from the *hrudka* can be saved and used when making *pascha*. To conserve the whey, place the colander over a large pot before pouring mixture into cheesecloth.)

Pascha _____

3 cups scalded milk, or enough scalded milk added to whey from hrudka to make 3 cups
½ tsp. salt
6 beaten eggs
½ cup lukewarm water
½ cup sugar
l cup melted butter
½ large cake yeast or equivalent portion of dry yeast
12 to 14 cups flour.

In a large bowl, combine milk, sugar, with butter and cool to lukewarm. Save 2 tablespoons of the eggs and add the rest of the eggs to the milk mixture. In a separate bowl, crumble yeast in water and let stand for 10 minutes. Add to above mixture. Add flour, about 2 cups at a time, until the dough can be handled.

Knead on floured board for 15 minutes. Place dough in greased bowl, grease top and let rise in a warm place for about 1½ hours.

Punch down, and let rise a second time for about 45 minutes.

After second rising, shape into four balls and place into greased pans. Small, 1½ quart enameled saucepans can be used for baking. Let rise. Brush tops with 2 tablespoons eggs to which some milk has been added. To achieve that glazed appearance on the loaves, brush tops several times prior to removing them from the oven. Bake at 325 degrees for about 1 hour.

Photo by Bob Bruce.

Note: Before placing dough in pans, about 1 cup of the dough can be saved and shaped into designs (plaits, crosses, etc.) and placed on top of the unbaked *paschy*. These fancy shapes can be prevented from scorching in the oven by placing aluminum foil on top of the *pascha* during baking.

Hrin _____

(Beets with Horseradish)

8 cans whole beets, drained
3 bottles horseradish (Do not use creamed horseradish.)

Grind beets, using fine grinder attachment. The juice can be saved for soup. Add horseradish to beets; mix well, refrigerate. An empty horseradish jar (washed, label removed and dipped in boiling water to sterilize it) can be filled with the mixture and placed in the Easter basket. The jar's cap can be disguised with aluminum foil, thus hiding any advertisement.

Kolachi _____

(Nut and poppyseed)

8 egg yolks
8 cups flour
½ lb. butter
1 cake yeast
I cup sugar
2 cups scalded milk
4 tbs. shortening

Beat eggs and sugar. Melt butter and shortening in hot milk, saving ½ cup for the yeast. Dissolve yeast in lukewarm milk and let stand for a few minutes. Combine both mixtures in large bowl.

Add flour and mix well with hands until dough leaves the hands. Refrigerate overnight. In the morning, divide the dough into eight balls and let rise for one hour. Roll out on floured board and spread with filling. Roll up gently, tucking in ends.

Bake at 350 degrees until brown, about 45 minutes.

Brush tops of rolls, prior to putting into oven, with an egg-milk mixture. Doing so produces beautifully browned, shiny rolls.

Nut Filling

1 lb. ground walnuts
1 cup canned milk
½ cup sugar
2 eggs
½ cup honey (optional)

Combine sugar and nuts. Beat eggs and add to mixture, add honey and milk. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly. Bring to boil, remove from stove; let cool. Roll out dough to ½-inch thick; brush with butter; place filling on dough and roll up. Bake.

Poppyseed Filling

l lb. ground poppyseed
½ cup honey
½ cup sugar
2 Tsp. butter, melted
½ cup milk

Combine sugar with poppyseed. Add melted butter. Then add honey and milk. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly until blended. Cool and spread over dough that has been rolled out to ½-inch thickness and brushed with butter. Roll up and bake.

Ham _____

The ham is decorated and baked according to your favorite recipe. How large a ham you buy and use depends on how many people you are serving. For a 20-pound ham: Cut it in half, decorate the halves, bake them and place one of them in the basket.

Kolbasi_____

Again, the amount of kolbasi purchased depends on how many eager eaters you are serving.

Place the kolbasi in a pan, cover with water and boil for about 45 minutes. Some cooks, after the kolbassi is boiled, place a few into a baking pan and sprinkle them with about 2 tablespoons of brown sugar and honey. This is then popped into the oven for about 15 minutes at 350 degrees. Cool before refrigerating.

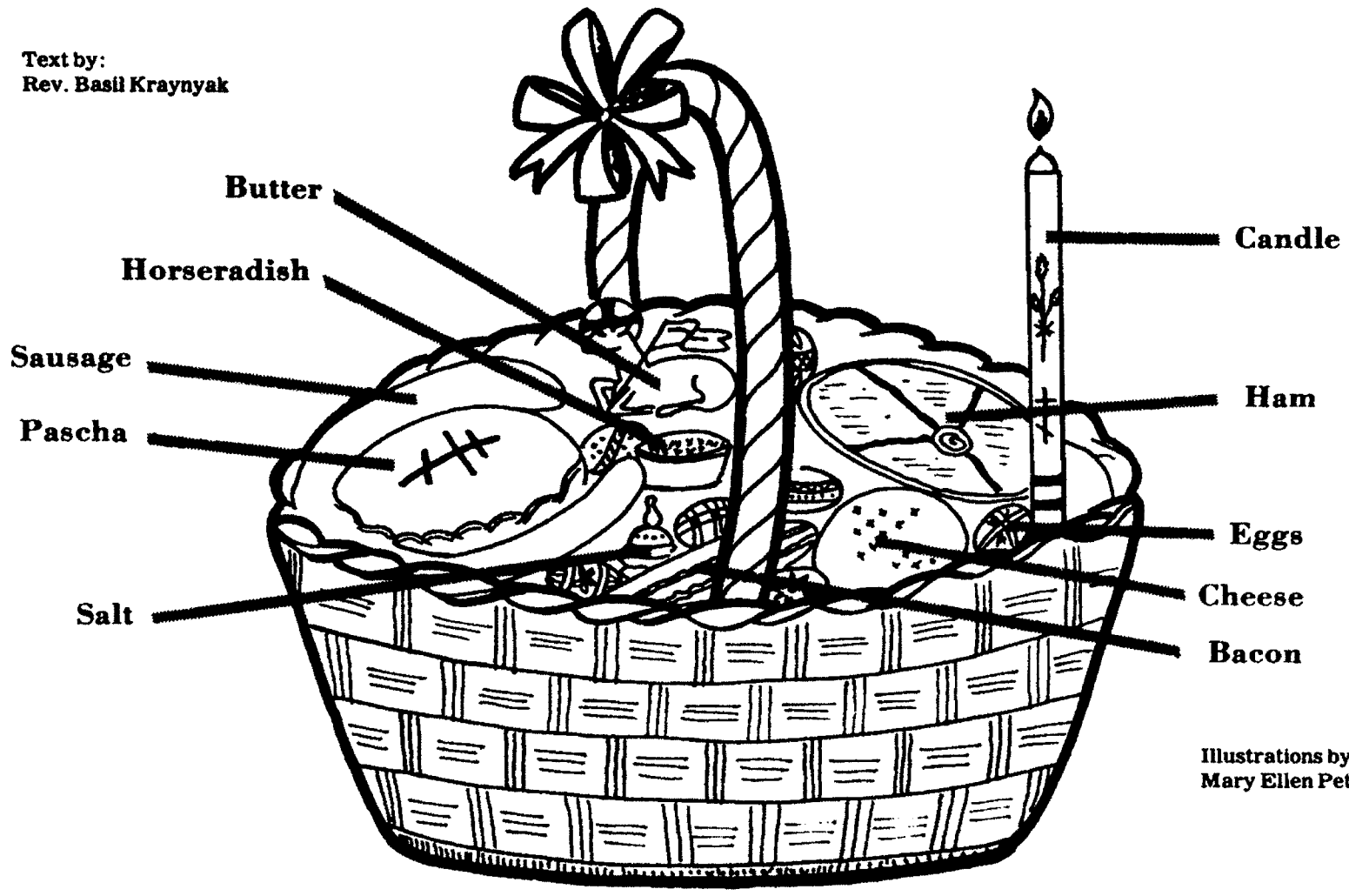
Butter _____

If you prefer not to use already prepared butter for the Easter feasting, the butter can be made by whipping heavy cream. Use either one pint or one-half pint heavy whipping cream. Place in bowl and mix with hand beater until butter forms. Place sample of butter in a small fancy bowl and decorate for use in Easter basket.

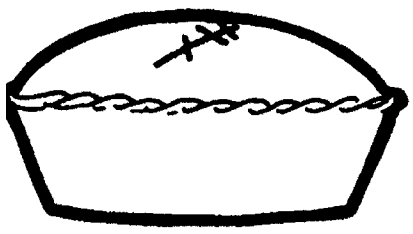
(The above is a revised version of an article that originally appeared in the April 10, 1979, edition of the Homestead, PA, Daily Messenger.)

How to Put Together a Traditional Easter Basket

Text by:
Rev. Basil Kraynyak

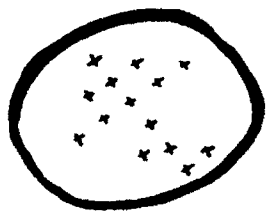


Illustrations by:
Mary Ellen Petro

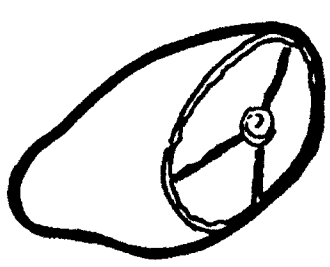


PASCHA - The Easter Bread (pron. pá-ska.) A sweet, yeast bread rich in eggs, butter, etc. Symbolic of Christ Himself who is our True Bread. Usually a round loaf baked with a golden crust decorated with a symbol indicative of Christ. Sometimes a cross (+) of dough is placed on top encircled by a plait giving it a crowned effect or Greek abbreviatios for the name of Christ. The letters XB indicate the Slavonic for Christ is Risen.

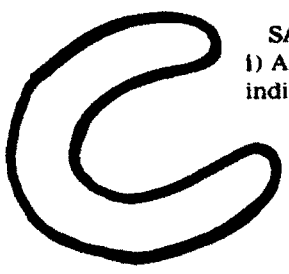
CHEESE (Slav. Hrudka or Sirets pron. hrood-ka or sí-rets) A custard-type cheese shaped into a ball having a rather bland but sweet taste indicative of the moderation that Christians should have in all things. Also, creamed cheese is placed in a small dish and both are decorated with symbols (see Pascha) out of cloves or pepper balls.



HAM (Slav Šunka - pron. shoon-ka.) The flesh meat popular with the Slavs as the main dish because of its richness and symbolic of the great joy and abundance of Easter. Some may prefer Lamb or Veal. This is usually well roasted or cooked as well as other meats so that the festivity of the day will not be burdened with preparation and all may enjoy the Feast.

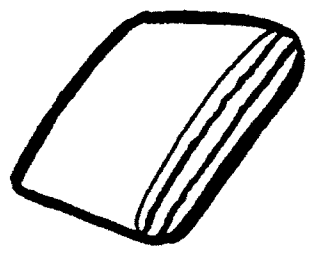


BUTTER (Slav. Maslo pron. má-slo) This favorite dairy product is shaped into a figure of a Lamb or small cross and decorated as the cheese. This reminds us of the goodness of Christ that we should have toward all things.

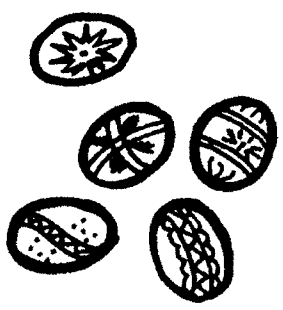


SAUSAGE (SLAV. Kolbasi - pron. kol-buś-i) A spicy, garlicy sausage of pork products, indicative of God's favor and generosity.

BACON (Slav. Slanina pron. sla-ní-na) A piece of uncooked bacon cured with spices. Symbolic of the overabundance of God's mercy to us.



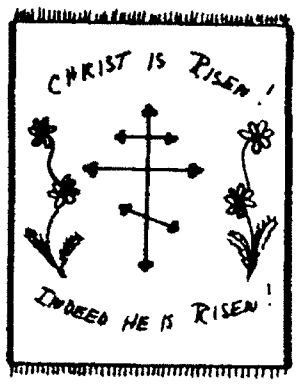
SALT (Slav. Sol' pron. sol') A condiment necessary for flavor reminding the Christian of his duty to others.



EGGS (Slav. Pisanki pron. pi-sún-ki) Hard-boiled eggs brightly decorated with symbols and markings made with beeswax. Indicative of new life and resurrection.

These articles are placed in a **wicker basket** and a ribbon or bow is tied to the handle. A **decorated candle** is placed in the basket and is lit at the time of blessing. A **linen cover** usually embroidered with a picture of the Risen Christ or symbol with the words "Christ is Risen" is placed over the food when brought to the Church.

In some places a large Easter Bread (Pascha) is made and brought separately in a large linen cloth. If the origin of the people was from a wine growing area, a sweet wine may be brought.



HORSERADISH (Slav. Chrin pron. khrin) Horseradish mixed with grated red beets. Symbolic of the Passion of Christ still in our minds but sweetened with some sugar because of the Resurrection. A bitter-sweet red colored mixture reminds us of the sufferings of Christ.

CHRIST IS RISEN! INDEED HE IS RISEN!