

# Maximizing Mass

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Fr. Nikola shares his thoughts on “maximizing” the Mass experience. For more meditations by Fr. Nikola, see his blog **Finding the Plug** on [rcspirituality](https://rcspirituality.org/blog/finding-the-plug) (<https://rcspirituality.org/blog/finding-the-plug>).



## Not just any Easter basket...

On Holy Saturday, we will honor the long tradition of blessing Easter Baskets at the parish. What does blessing Easter baskets have to do with Mass? It's a great moment to learn about sacramentals and to help us to receive them, including the celebration of the Eucharist at Easter.

The *Catechism* teaches (n. 1670) that sacramentals “by the Church’s prayer, ... prepare us to receive grace and dispose us to cooperate with it. ‘For well-disposed members of the faithful, the liturgy of the sacraments and sacramentals sanctifies almost every event of their lives with the divine grace which flows from the Paschal mystery of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ. From this source all sacraments and sacramentals draw their power.’ (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 61).”

The blessing of Easter baskets represents a moment of passage from the penance of Lent to the joy of Easter. This tradition comes predominantly from Slavic Christianity. Catholics and Eastern Orthodox from Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Ukraine, among others, prepare a basket of food with which they’ll begin their celebrations on Easter Sunday. Everyone gathered for the celebration samples a little of everything in the basket.

However, this is not just any Easter basket; in addition to containing foods we abstained from eating during Lent, there are foods symbolizing various aspects of the Paschal mystery:

- **Cooked Eggs (decorated and plain).** Symbolizing Resurrection and new life.
- **Lamb.** Symbolizing Our Lord as the Lamb of God. In some cultures veal or fish is substituted and the lamb is symbolized in other ways.
- **A Yeast Bread.** The Easter bread symbolizes Our Lord as the Bread of Life. The yeast, making the bread rise, evokes the Resurrection.
- **Butter.** Shaped either as a lamb or as a cross decorated with cloves.
- **A candle.** In some baskets a candle is included and lit while the basket is

blessed to represent Christ as the light of the world.

- **Ham and Bacon.** Bacon symbolizes God’s overabundance and generosity, since it is such a rich meat. Pork was forbidden in the Old Testament, so eating it now symbolizes that all things are made new in Christ.
- **Sausage Links.** The symbolism here is not so much the sausage as the links: their resemblance to chains or bonds symbolizes that Our Lord has broken the chains of death and rose triumphant from the grave.
- **Salt.** In Poland salt is a symbol of hospitality, but salt also reminds us as Christians that we are called to be the “salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13).
- **Horseradish.** Often mixed with beets, horseradish symbolizes Our Lord’s Passion and the blood he shed.
- **Cheese.** Symbolizes the moderation Christians should have at all times.
- **Cake.** The recipes vary, and sometimes the cake is baked in the shape of a lamb.
- **Wine.** Symbolizing joy.

Not all these foods are found in every Easter basket, but the foods found do serve as more than simple Easter treats. Just as Saint Paul describes Our Lord’s Resurrection as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep (see 1 Corinthians 15:20), these foods are the first fruits of the joy we’ll celebrate throughout the Easter season.

