

# Ideas For Lent And Easter

## Celebrate the Year and the Faith. A Candle is Lighted.

By P. Stewart Craig.

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{This is the second part of a fascinating book recently produced by the Grail in England, We are sure many of our own readers will find the information illuminating and the suggestions well worth following through.}

LENT TO EASTER.

SHROVE TUESDAY, FASTEN EVEN.

This day was a general holiday, particularly for apprentices, and it would have been strange if it had not frequently become a day into which people tried to cram all the pleasure they would soon have to forego during Lent.

In Norwich, as probably in other cities, processions were made to symbolize the rapid approach of Lent. In 1440, say the Norwich records, such a procession was instigated by a certain John Gladman, who was known "as a man ever true and faithful to God." Crowned as king of Christmas, his horse bedecked with gilt and every sort of finery and tinsel he was preceded in the procession by twelve other horsemen, each representing a month of the year and each dressed appropriately. Last in the procession, following after the glittering king of Christmas, came Lent, a horseman dressed from head to foot in white cloth and herring skins, mounted on a horse with trappings of oyster shells — and this "in token that sadness should follow, and a holy time." Thus they rode through Norwich, and many others of the townspeople joined in, dressed in every sort of fantastic dress, all of them "making mirth, disports and plays."

That they ate pancakes everywhere is merely because eggs and butter and milk had to be finished off before the fasting began, and the making of pancakes, the beating of the batter, the frying and tossing of the pancakes, could be a festive affair.

There seems no reason why one should not have a party on Shrove Tuesday. Few people have the faintest idea why pancakes are eaten, so these could be made and the reason for them explained.

Now, when butter and eggs and milk are all allowed in Lent one might let the party include a last ceremonial tasting of whatever those taking part intend to give up during these forty days — sweets, sugar, cigarettes, whatever it may be. In Kent, it was once the custom to make two effigies on Shrove Tuesday, and to burn them to ashes as a sign that good living was now over and done with and that a stricter time was at hand, and at a Shrove-tide party there could be a short explanation of Lent, while it might very well end up with the whole group going to confession.

LENT.

"ALL Fools' day" (April 1st) hardly springs to mind as having the slightest connection with Lent. All the same, it seems reasonable enough to believe that it alludes to the mockery of Christ by the Jews, and "that as the passion of our Savior took place about this time of the year, and as the Jews sent Jesus backwards and forwards to mock and torment him, that is, from Annas to Caiphas, from Caiphas to Pilate, from Pilate to Herod and from Herod back again to Pilate, this ridiculous or rather impious custom took its rise from thence, by which we send about from one place to another such persons as we think proper objects of our ridicule." It is worth remembering that the commonest way of making "April fools" of people is by sending them on absurd errands.

Mothering Sunday or Laetare Sunday, Shere Thursday or Maundy Thursday are names of which not everyone knows the origin. Mothering Sunday is so called because the Mid-Lent Sunday Mass likens the Church to a mother. The meaning of Shere Thursday, if shere were spelt "shear" in the modern way would not surprise us: "The people would that day shere (shear) their heads and clip their beards, and so make them honest against Easter Day," thus suggesting, perhaps, that the Lenten austerities included abstinence from shaving or hair-dressing as well as from certain foods. The word "Maundy" is derived from "mandatum," a command, and it was in virtue of Christ's command at the Last Supper that we should imitate him that on this day kings and queens and bishops undertook to wash the feet of poor people, as Christ had washed his apostles' feet, and at the same time to give them gifts. In 1530, when Cardinal Wolsey washed the feet of 59 poor men, he gave each one "twelve pence in money, three ells of good canvas to make them shirts, a pair of new shoes, a cast of red herrings and three white herrings."

Dried herrings, indeed, together with dried peas and beans, seem to have been the staple food of Lent, and Passion Sunday (the fifth Sunday of Lent) in the north of England was even called "Carle Sunday" from the invariable custom of eating carlings, or dried peas. On Good Friday, after the veneration of the cross, when people brought offerings of eggs and wheat to the church, they made a herb pudding, whose chief ingredient was the 'passion dock' (the plant Persicaria bistorta), and which could hardly have been intended as a palatable dish. Neither could the buns, baked with a cross, which they ate, since they were originally unleavened and certainly reminiscent of the bread used at the Last Supper. On this day, in Connaught and in central Ireland, it was quite common for children, even babies, to fast, so that from midnight on Maundy Thursday to midnight on Good Friday they ate nothing, and in the case of babies, drank nothing at all, while their parents did a hard day's work on only a drink of water and a small piece of dry bread. It is entirely in keeping with the human understanding of the Church that no one was shocked when these same people at midday on Holy Saturday clapped their hands loudly, shouted: "Out with the Lent!" and set to on a piece of bacon, or a chicken, or whatever their family purse allowed!

#### MOTHERING SUNDAY (the fourth Sunday of Lent).

It is Saint Paul's words in the Mass of the day that gives Mothering Sunday its name. He speaks of "that Jerusalem which is above . . . which is our mother," On this day, everyone paid a solemn visit to his mother church, and left an offering there at the high altar.

The Introit or Entrance antiphon, Communion antiphon and tract (a Psalm between the Readings) of the Mass speak of the heavenly Jerusalem where Christians will raise their songs of joy.

Heaven, the heavenly Jerusalem, has so often been likened to and represented as a garden full of flowers, that on this day the Church used to bless the loveliest of flowers, the rose. Rose vestments,

where available are allowed to be worn on this 'Rose Sunday', the Laetare or 'Rejoice' Sunday of Lent.

The word "mothering" came to have other associations; it became a feast day for the mothers of families. All the children who were away from home went back on that day to visit their mothers, taking with them "a present of money, a trinket, or some nice eatable, and they are all anxious not to fail in this custom." The "nice eatable" was often a 'mothering cake'. Exactly what this was made of seems uncertain, but at any rate, it was highly ornamented and adorned. In return, the mother seems to have provided for the visitors a dish of 'furmety', a sort of rice pudding, only made with grains of wheat instead of rice.

There are relics of the observance of Mothering Sunday still left, but there is no reason why it should not be more widely noted, and given as much attention in every family as is the mother's birthday. All children could give gifts to their mothers; where she is dead, they can have a Mass said; otherwise they can begin the Sunday by offering their Mass for her. They could link up their gift with the one-time blessing of the roses, and give her flowers; or they could arrange some entertainment or amusement for her; they could even try their hand at a 'mothering cake'. And in return, of course, the mother would certainly be only too glad to give her children a modern equivalent of 'furmety'!

#### PASSION SUNDAY (THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT).

Today, in the church, all the statues, pictures and even the crucifixes are veiled until Holy Saturday. That the crucifix is also hidden is the remains of the custom of hanging a curtain between sanctuary and nave during the whole of Lent.

In most homes, there will be a crucifix, perhaps pictures or statues. On Passion Sunday (the fifth Sunday of Lent), we might remove them all, and their very absence will bring our minds much more often to the thought of the Passion than would their familiar presence.

#### SAINT BENEDICT'S DAY: MARCH 21st. (Now July 11th.)

Saint Benedict is the patron of bee-keepers, and those who themselves have bees could not do better than mark his day by praying for their hives. Farmers can pray for their cattle and their barns; fishermen for their fishing boats and the fish in the sea, why should bee-keepers do less? In some parts of France it was, and may still be, customary for bee-keepers to have a medal of Saint Benedict affixed to their hives:

"O Lord, God almighty, who has created heaven and earth and every animal existing over them and in them for the use of men, and who has commanded through the ministers of holy Church that candles made from the products of bees be lit in church during the carrying out of the sacred office in which the most holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ Your Son is made present and is received; may Your holy blessing descend upon these bees and these hives, so that they may multiply, be fruitful and be preserved from all ills and that the fruits coming forth from them may be distributed for Your praise and that of Your Son and the Holy Spirit and of the most blessed Virgin Mary."

#### PALM SUNDAY (the Sixth Sunday of Lent).

"It is called Palm Sunday because the palm betokens victory, wherefore all Christian people should bear palms in processions to signify that the Lord has fought with the fiend, our enemy, and has the victory over him." But palms are also used on this day in memory of the acclamations of the Jewish

crowds on Christ's journey into Jerusalem and their waving of palm branches before him. Once it was the custom to have a palm procession with the Blessed Sacrament, before which the people waved green branches and sang hosannas. Occasionally, instead of the Blessed Sacrament the priest bore a copy of the New Testament, which was intended to represent our Lord.

Actual palm, of course, was not used, since it could not be found in Britain. Box and willow branches, and sometimes yew, were all called 'palm'. On this day, parties of boys or girls used to go out collecting willow. Everyone decorated their houses with it on Palm Sunday, while the church too was adorned. Generally, the countryside is beautiful now, and nothing there is lovelier than the willow tree. This day could see family or school or club expeditions into the spring countryside to find willow branches both for their homes and for their parish church.

Just before beginning the decorating of the house, all could say this prayer, adapted from the ceremony of the blessing of the palms:

"O God who did bless the people who carried branches to meet Jesus; bless also these branches which we have gathered and with which we mean to honor Your name, so that wherever they are placed, people may obtain Your blessing and may be protected from all adversity by Your right hand. Through Christ our Lord."

#### MAUNDY THURSDAY, SHERE THURSDAY.

The last king in this country of Britain, who performed the office of washing the feet of the poor, in imitation of Christ, was the Catholic king, James II. In the Catholic Church, the custom has never died out and the Mandatum may be seen in many churches on Maundy Thursday. When Christ said to the apostles: "I have been setting you an example, which will teach you in your turn to do what I have done for you," he spoke to all Christians. Maundy Thursday therefore could be a special day when all Catholics deliberately set out to give their services to someone who needs help, and to do it in the spirit of Christ's self-forgetfulness. Such service should include the seeking out of someone who needs help. It might be looking after a child so that the mother could have a free evening, undertaking some mending or darning, humble, unostentatious things like that.

What is more, such service might very well begin at close quarters, for in every home or school or club there must be someone who needs help, and such people, just because they are so close to us, can easily be overlooked.

#### GOOD FRIDAY.

Today the crucifix, which each home is certain to possess and which was put away on Passion Sunday (the fifth Sunday of Lent) in unison with the custom in the churches, could be brought out again, and this time, during the whole day, placed in the most prominent position in the house.

Until very recent times Good Friday was a day of strict fasting, and many people alive now can remember that as children they were allowed no milk and no butter. This, however, was mild in comparison with the fasts of their grandparents. Today, when fasting in Lent has been, temporarily at least, modified (it was abolished altogether during the recent war), one could still make some sacrifice. One of Christ's sufferings on the cross was that of thirst; we could all go without drinking anything on this day; or we could sacrifice one meal. But one has to realize that any outward thing like fasting has to be equaled by an attempt at interior fasting from deliberate failings or imperfections; otherwise, it is simply hypocrisy.

## THE WAY OF THE CROSS.

It was a Spanish Dominican who first set up in his Church, pictures of Christ's journey to Calvary and who thus began one of the most popular practices of the Church and one which most people follow in Lent and Holy week, even if erratically.

To make the way of the cross, pictures are not essential it is only the wooden crosses over the pictures that are necessary. Not only are pictures unessential but so are any set prayers, such as the Our Father, Hail Mary and Gloria (Glory Be) commonly said at each station. The essence of the practice lies simply in uniting yourself with Christ in his passion, pondering on all that took place on the road to Calvary, and on there being moving from one station to the next as you do so.

This is not so difficult. The devotion is not meant to be a pious lamentation nor an emotional wallowing. One can think how Mary and the apostles must have made the way of the cross after Christ's death. Their little pilgrimage must have been simplicity itself, the silence hardly broken "here is where he fell . . . here is where Simon helped him . . . here is where he died." That is the way to make the stations, simply, directly and without much speaking.

It can even become a joyful devotion. There is the true story of the Passionist lay brother who always made the stations on Easter Sunday. Asked why he continued such an essentially Lenten practice into the joyful time of Easter, he said simply "I think of each station and all that happened, and then I say to our Lord, 'Now all that is over, now you are happy'."

## EASTER TO WHITSUN (PENTECOST Sunday).

THE time from Easter Sunday to the Saturday after Whitsun (Pentecost) is not misnamed "the feast of feasts." Take away Saint Mark's day (April 25th) and the other three Rogation days (the 'Asking' days of some fasting — Monday to Wednesday preceding Ascension Thursday) and it is a series of celebrations of one sort or another — and even the Rogation days, despite themselves, seem to have been drenched by the general tide of joyfulness.

During these fifty days, there was no fasting; no prayers of the divine office were said kneeling, and the alleluia was sung on every possible occasion. Round Easter itself centered numberless general and local festivities, many of them apparently trivial enough and yet sometimes springing from a deeper source than one might have expected — the Easter standard, Easter candle, Easter garden, Pasch or Easter eggs, Easter heaving (games involving 'lifting up' of the players mimicking Christ's rising), and so on.

Every possible excuse was found for the using of lights and candles, and even more of flowers and leaves. The days of May which fall between Easter and Whitsun saw green branches strewn everywhere, and men and women decked with sprigs of whitethorn; the Sunday within the octave of the Ascension was Rose Sunday and all the Church pavements were strewn with rose petals. Pentecost itself was often called "the Pasch of Roses".

"Going processioning" on Rogation days, though it was called in some places, perhaps with a certain grudging "grass week" because salads, eggs and green sauce formed the main food, still gave enough occasion for the display of flowers; all the streets were decorated with birch branches, and all the girls and children who took part adorned themselves with flower garlands.

## THE EASTER CANDLE.

"Lumen Christi!" sings the priest, holding the paschal candle on Holy Saturday, the Easter Vigil. ("Light of Christ!") In memory of this light of Christ, we can have a candle burning in the home, rather as we did at Christmas. This time, the candle, which should be as large as we can get it, should be set in a vase containing flowers, and can burn during meals during the octave of the feast. The significance could be explained the first time it is lighted, and one could also mention that the flowers as well are emblems of the resurrection, since they, too, have risen from the earth, though the coldness of winter might have seemed to overcome them.

#### EASTER EGGS.

In some parts of the country these eggs are called paste or pace eggs, a corruption of the name "Pasch egg". Their symbolism is obvious enough, since the apparently lifeless egg contains the elements of new life. "It is an emblem of the rising up out of the grave, in the same manner as the chick, entombed, as it were, in the egg, is in due time brought to life."

Almost everyone eats eggs on Easter day, and this blessing of eggs might well form the grace before meals on that day:

"We beseech You, O Lord, to give the favor of Your blessing to these eggs; that so they may be a wholesome food for Your faithful who gratefully take them in honor of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You, for ever and ever."

It is not surprising, in view of their symbolism, that eggs were decorated. Some were stained scarlet in honor of the blood Christ had shed in his passion, but generally, they were painted yellows and browns, and sometimes gilded. There are more ways of decorating eggs than by boiling them with cochineal. Onion peel gives a beautiful yellow ochre, furze gives yellow, nettle roots give a dark brown. One can stain the eggs and afterwards with a penknife scrape a design upon the shell: or a pattern, or perhaps someone's name may be written on the egg with the end of a candle, before the egg is cooked. On being boiled, the greased parts of the shell remain uncolored.

One cannot suggest a revival of the custom of giving eggs away at Easter when eggs are still rationed by wartime conditions. But anyone who has hens might decorate a small basket with flowers, place in it however many eggs she can spare, eggs stained and greased so that they shine, and she could even set in the midst of the eggs an unlighted Easter candle.

#### THE EASTER GARDEN.

Just as one makes a crib at Christmas, so one can make an Easter garden during Lent and set it up on Easter Saturday, adding and removing the figures, according to the Gospel story. This time one needs more figures — soldiers, angels, holy women, the apostles, Christ himself, and a sepulcher — but they can all be made in the same way as the Christmas figures, drawn on paper, glued on wood and cut out. If they are crude, never mind; an Easter garden is only a small demonstration of affection for Christ, not a test of skill.

Where this differs from the cribs, however, is that the figures should all be contained in a shallow box, in which one puts small flowers, roots and all. Here in this way one brings in some symbol of new life that has risen from the death of winter.

#### THE EASTER STANDARD.

Just as one hangs up flags and decorations to celebrate victory over an enemy, so now Christians raise a standard to honor the victory of Christ over death. Such a standard could be simply a tall

home-made cross, say 5-foot high, which could be set up formally in the garden and decorated with laurel, the emblem of victory — in fact with any flowers or branches or lanterns or ribbons. The Easter standard is something which could be explained to the children in a family, and which they could be given the task of setting up and decorating.

#### EASTER PRAYERS.

From Easter Sunday until Whitsun (Pentecost) one could follow the old custom of not kneeling to pray. Thus, grace before meals, night and morning prayers, could all be said standing, as a reminder of two things — first that Christ rose from the dead and that no power of man was able to keep him prostrate in his tomb; second that after the Ascension, our Lord will be sending the Holy Spirit to us, whom we should be ready and willing to receive. Our standing to pray could thus symbolize our readiness.

One might also, instead of grace before meals, sing a simple alleluia.

#### EASTER PLAYS.

There was an old tradition that the second coming of Christ would be on Easter eve, and the practice of watching before the sepulcher was partly based upon that. In the Abbey Church at Durham between 3 and 4 in the morning of Easter day some of the eldest monks came to the sepulcher "out of which they took a marvelous beautiful image of the resurrection, with a cross in the hand of the image of Christ, in the breast whereof was enclosed in bright crystal, the Host, so as to be conspicuous to the beholders. Then after the elevation of the said picture, it was carried by the said monks upon an embroidered cushion, the monks singing the anthem of Christus resurgens. (Christ, rising again from the dead.) " A procession formed behind the blessed Sacrament in this strange monstrance and proceeded to the high altar and thence round the church, "The whole choir following, with torches and great store of other lights; all singing, rejoicing and praying."

This was a primitive enough practice, a practice perhaps that was not without its dangers, but it must certainly have impressed upon everyone in the congregation the fact that Christ had risen and had conquered death.

So with the more deliberately dramatic presentations in the Church at Easter, no one had any reason for being unfamiliar with the great doctrines of faith. This drama grew out of the liturgical responses of the divine office. One of the most obvious things to present dramatically was the Easter Sequence: "Tell us Mary, say, what did you see on your way, to the tomb?"

"In some Churches it was ordained, that Mary Magdalen, Mary of Bethany and Mary of Naim (or Nain), should be represented by three deacons clothed in dalmatics and amices, and holding a vase in their hands. These performers came through the middle of the choir, and hastening towards the sepulcher, with downcast looks, said together this verse, 'Who will remove the stone for us?' Upon this a boy, clothed like an angel, in alb, and holding an ear of wheat in his hand, before the sepulcher said, "Whom do you seek in the sepulcher?" The Maries answered, "Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified." The boy-angel answered, "He is not here, but is risen"; and pointed to the place with his finger. The boy-angel departed very quickly, and two priests in tunics, sitting without the sepulcher, said, "Women, whom do ye mourn for? Whom do ye seek?" The middle one of the women said, "Sir, if you have taken him away, say so." The two sitting priests said, "Whom do you seek, women?" "He is not here, but is risen" The Maries, kissing the place, afterwards went from the sepulcher.

In the meantime, a priest, in the character of Christ, in an alb, with a stole, holding a cross, met them on the left side of the altar, and said, "Mary!" Upon hearing this, the mock Mary threw herself at his feet, and with a loud voice, cried "Rabboni! (Master!)" The priest representing Christ replied, nodding, "Noli me tangere," touch me not. This being finished, he again appeared at the right side of the altar, and said to them, as they passed before the altar, "Hail! Do not fear." This being finished, he concealed himself; and the women-deacons, as though joyful at hearing this, bowed to the altar, and turning to the choir, sang, "Alleluia, the Lord is risen."

Finally, another priest, representing Saint Peter, with an assistant representing Saint John, came to the 'women'. This priest, showing the cross, said, "They have taken away the Lord." The 'women' again turned to the choir and sang, "Alleluia, the Lord is risen."

Nowadays plenty of Easter plays are produced in schools and youth groups of all kind. Most of these could benefit by observing some of the formalism and austerity that marked the primitive Easter plays.

#### EASTER MONDAY.

In the early ages of the Church, Easter was the time for the baptism of the catechumens, to whose benefit, indeed, many of the Easter ceremonies were directed.

Easter Monday for many years was regarded as the special feast day of all those who had just finished their first year as Christians.

Whereas the pagans made much ado about the anniversary of their physical birth, so Christians attached a similar importance to the anniversary of their spiritual birth, their baptism.

One would not suggest the giving up of birthdays, but what one could do is to introduce into a home or school an equal celebration for the baptismal days. The family could all offer Mass, give presents and entertain each other as these baptismal days came round. It means, of course, a doubling of rejoicings, but no child will mind that; and what is more, it can be a means by which a child is taught to value the faith he has received.

#### LOW SUNDAY (the Second Sunday of Easter).

In the early ages of the Church, many people were baptized during the long ceremonies which for a time in the twentieth century were held early on Holy Saturday morning, but which were then held during the night of Holy Saturday, the Easter Vigil. After the blessing of the font came the baptism of the neophytes, who afterwards dressed themselves in white garments as a sign of their new cleanliness of soul. They wore these garments all day and every day until Low Sunday, which came to be called: "The Sunday for the leaving-off of white garments" ("in albis depositis"). It is believed that the day came to be called Low Sunday in this country of Britain because of the insistence on lowliness and childlikeness in the Introit or Entrance antiphon of the day's Mass. It is also 'low', when compared to the 'High' Sunday of Easter itself, the first day of the Easter Octave.

Low Sunday could be an occasion in any club or youth group for the renewing of baptismal vows. The story of this Sunday, "in albis depositis" could first be explained to them, then the ceremony of baptism, then the promises that were undertaken on their behalf by their godparents. By arrangement with the priest, the whole group could go into the church and make the baptismal promises once more, this time on their own behalf.

For assistance in the explanation to be given to the group material may be found in the Catholic Truth Society pamphlet: "Baptisms and Churchings", by C. C. Martindale, S.J.

The ceremony could be arranged in this way (Or you may use the slightly simpler ritual found in most modern Missals): —

#### RENEWAL OF BAPTISM.

The Priest, in surplice and white stole, stands in the sanctuary: the group stand in one row at the Communion rail or at the foot of the Sanctuary.

Priest and group sing an appropriate hymn. Then the priest, facing the group, makes the sign of the cross, and says: —

PRIEST: What do you ask of the Church of God?

MEMBERS: Faith.

PRIEST: What does faith bring you to?

MEMBERS: Life everlasting.

PRIEST: If, then, you desire to enter into life, keep the commandments:

You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart,  
your whole soul, and with your whole mind,  
and your neighbor as yourself.

MEMBERS: Amen.

PRIEST: Do you renounce Satan?

MEMBERS: I do renounce him.

PRIEST: And all his works?

MEMBERS: I do renounce them.

PRIEST: And all his pomps?

MEMBERS: I do renounce them.

PRIEST: Do you believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth?

MEMBERS: I do believe.

PRIEST: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born into this world and suffered for us?

MEMBERS: I do believe.

PRIEST: Do you believe in the Holy Ghost,

the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?

MEMBERS: I do believe.

PRIEST: Pray, then, kneel down and say the "Our Father."

(Kneeling, they say slowly together the "Our Father." The priest gives to everyone a candle, that one of the group lights from the Easter Candle, then he says): —

PRIEST: Receive this burning light, and without fail be true to your baptism, that, when our Lord shall come to claim his own you may be worthy to meet him, together with all the saints in the heavenly court, and live for ever and ever. MEMBERS: Amen.

PRIEST: Receive the sign of the cross upon your forehead and also in your heart, and in your manners be such that you may now be the temple of God.

MEMBERS: Amen.

PRIEST: Peace be with you.

MEMBERS: And with your spirit.

They all stand with the burning candles in their hands and conclude with a hymn.

#### THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

On this day, we commemorate the protection that Saint Joseph bestows upon the whole family of the Church; this is a recent feast in honor of Saint Joseph, for only in 1847 was it ordered to be kept throughout the world. [It is no longer of obligation but remains a salutary custom.] But years before 1847, Saint Teresa of Avila had said all that needed to be said about devotion to Saint Joseph: "I took for my patron and lord, the glorious Saint Joseph, and recommended myself earnestly to him. I saw clearly that he rendered me greater services than I knew how to ask for. I cannot call to mind that I have ever asked him at any time for anything he has not granted. I am full of amazement when I consider the great favors, which God has given me through this blessed saint, the dangers from which he has delivered me, both of body and soul. To other saints our Lord seems to have given grace to succor men in some special necessity: but to this glorious saint, I know by experience, to help us in all! And our Lord would have us understand that, as he was himself subject upon earth — for Saint Joseph, having the title of father, and being his guardian, could command him — so now in heaven he performs all his petitions."

Saint Joseph, being the head and protector of the family of Nazareth, is fittingly the protector of the whole Church and no less of all the single families that go to make up the Church. He is the pattern of family life. Why should this Sunday not be celebrated in an appropriate way? All the members of the family could come home and they could arrange some sort of entertainment or festivity for themselves. And before the day is out various family affairs might be recommended to Saint Joseph by the whole family together; it is only fitting that any family difficulties or trials or joys should be shared with the saint who shared such things with Jesus and Mary. (Saint Joseph's own Feast Day is March 19th.)

#### ROGATION DAYS: CROSS DAYS.

The Rogation days are Saint Mark's day (April 25th) and the other three Rogation days (the 'Asking' days of some fasting — Monday to Wednesday preceding Ascension Thursday). The first Rogation procession was made more than 1,500 years ago, and its litanies and antiphons were meant to avert God's anger from his people and to call down his blessing on the fruits of the fields. It is not strange that the procession came gradually to make its way over fields and meadows and ploughed land, in fact throughout the whole of the parish. In seaside parishes, these processions included prayers for the harvest of the sea and they probably made their way along the sands or cliffs.

In some places the Rogation days were called the Cross days, probably because the procession halted every so often at certain crosses or at certain trees marked with a cross, at which the priest read from the New Testament before the crowd took up the litanies and antiphons once more.

Children in the procession carried green boughs, the girls decorated themselves with flower garlands, and the men carried banners and a cross. All the streets were hung with green branches.

In Staffordshire by the early 18th century, the processioning had taken a rather different form; the whole village went out on the three days, led by the children, who bore long poles decorated with

every sort of flower, and all together, they sang over and over again the psalm: "All ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord."

There are not many processions now over the fields on Rogation days; still, after our answering the litanies in Church after Mass, we might spend the days in something of the old spirit. In a school or club, we could have a procession like that once prevailing in Staffordshire, and thus call on all the created things of God to bless him.

Certainly, night or morning prayers might include one or more of the Church's prayers for the fruits of the earth; particularly if those who pray have a garden:

"We implore Your blessing, Almighty God, that You will deign to nourish this earth with temperate winds, to pour over it like a shower of rain Your gracious blessings, granting to Your people to give thanks to You eternally for Your gifts."

#### ASCENSION DAY.

Saint Luke tells us that Christ, after he had eaten a meal in the Cenacle, led the whole troop of apostles through the city on the last journey he would make upon earth, and ". . . when he had led them as far as Bethany he lifted up his hands and blessed them; and even as he blessed them he parted from them and was carried up into heaven." It is easy to understand why on Ascension Day the priest led the people in solemn procession before Mass, that this last walk of Christ's might be remembered.

Since this procession has fallen into disuse, one could make a solitary visit to a church during the day. The apostles, of course, saw Christ going before them. But if we cannot, we have no less certainty that he is with us, closer than he was to any of the apostles on that first Ascension Day. During that walk to the church, we can do what the apostles did — praise and bless God and thank him for the Holy Spirit whom he is going to send us.

A custom has survived in some parts of this country of Britain of opening the New Testament at random on this day, considering that in the page chosen there may be, as it were, some final message from Jesus as he makes his way back into heaven. Each one in turn opens the New Testament and reads the whole chapter he has lighted on, while the rest of the family or group help him to make that chapter practical for himself.

#### WHIT SUNDAY (PENTECOST)

This feast has been called the Pasch of Roses, because red roses are thought to be emblems of the tongues of fire that descended upon Mary and the apostles. It is for the same reason that red vestments are worn at the Whitsun Masses.

In the thirteenth century in some parts of Europe, a dove was set free inside the church during the Mass, while pieces of lighted tow were dropped from the roof. Childish enough, one may say, but at least it attempted to drive home the reality of what happened on the first Whitsun. Doves and lighted rope are hardly possible nowadays, but there is a way of impressing the significance of Whitsun on ourselves. Just as we make a crib at Christmas and an Easter garden at Easter, so we can make a cenacle at Whitsun. We shall need figures of eleven apostles and our Lady, while the Dove can hang over all of them and the tongues of fire radiate from the Dove. We can link up the cenacle with the old name for Whit Sunday by decorating it with red roses, the symbolism of which should

be explained. Morning and evening during the octave of Whitsun this prayer to the Holy Spirit could be said near the cenacle:

"O Holy Spirit, soul of my soul, I adore You: enlighten, guide, strengthen and console me. Tell me what I ought to do, and command me to do it. I promise to be submissive to everything that You shall ask and to accept all that You permit to happen to me; only show me what is Your will."

#### MAY DAY (May 1st).

No other month would seem to be better fitted for dedication to our Lady than May, the month that finally conquers winter and that sees all the spring flowers in blossom. How close the common association of Mary with the hedgerow flowers has always been one can see by the very names we still give to these flowers. 'Lady's smock', 'marigold', 'lady's thistle', 'lady's bedstraw', 'may blossom', are all called after Mary. Early, on the first day of her month — "the merry month" — it was once universal in this country of Britain to go 'maying', when "every man, except impediment, would walk in the sweet meadows and green woods, there to rejoice their spirits with the beauty and savor of sweet flowers and with the harmony of birds praising God in their kind," while they collected branches of hawthorn or may, so that there was no house door nor window, no church nor street that was not decorated with green branches. Men wore sprigs of may in their hats; women who had risen long before dawn to pick cowslips, primroses and wild violets made them into garlands and hung them up in the churches.

Why should the first of May not be the day when all Catholics wear flowers in honor of Mary? May blossom is probably one of the easiest blossoms to get hold of, but if it is impossible, then any spring flower could be worn. After all, people wear flowers and vegetation to the honor of Saint George (April 23), Saint Patrick (March 17), Saint David (March 1st) and Saint Andrew (November 30), so why should they not do so in our Lady's honor?

In some families, it might be possible to arrange a 'maying' expedition on the first day of the month; in clubs or schools, the first Sunday of the month would probably have to be substituted.

During the expedition, everyone could gather as many different sorts of flowers as possible and the most perfect branches of may blossom. Formerly any member of a family who succeeded in finding a branch of may in full blossom was entitled to a prize and this element of competition could enter into the 'maying' expedition. The flowers, when brought home, could either be given to the parish church or they could be used to decorate the statue of our Lady which most homes possess. Incidentally, anyone who organized such a 'maying' day would immediately come up against — and have a chance to destroy — the still rampant superstition against may blossom, by which it is believed that such flowers in a home are a portent of death.

May the first is also the wonderful feast of Saint Joseph the Worker.

#### MAY PILGRIMAGES.

Anyone who takes the trouble to use her local library in Great Britain (and indeed in many places throughout the globe) to discover something of local history is almost certain to find that within a reasonable distance there was once a shrine dedicated to our Lady.

There may be ruins of it left; it may have vanished. All the same, it is possible to arrange in any school or club a pilgrimage to the shrine. Someone should tell the pilgrims the story of that particular shrine and the purpose of shrines in general, before they set out. If there are not even

ruins left, the pilgrims could take a statue of Mary with them and place it on the site that was once dedicated to her. A pilgrimage like this can mean a whole day in the country and it ought to be enlivened with games and songs and outdoor cooking if possible. In some cases where records remain, no matter how fragmentary, of the shrine and yet it exists no longer, a club or youth group could attempt to reproduce on a small scale in their own meeting place the lost shrine. Or they could even create an entirely new shrine to replace the lost one. In this way the statue of our Lady which is so familiar because of its perpetual presence might be given a certain air of unfamiliarity, and it would then be not just "our Lady," but "our Lady of Missenden," "our Lady of Willesden," "our Lady of Sudbury," our Lady of our own district".

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