

DIVERSITY AT WORK

April 2007

(for interest/information purposes only)

APRIL is “Multicultural Communication Month”...Multicultural communications may seem difficult at first; differences in languages, backgrounds, customs, etc. all seem a challenge. By learning more about our different cultures, it becomes easier to interact. This month has been dedicated to further this cause.

Aboriginal Spirituality: Mmaal The season when rivers open. The canoes can be launched and travel on the Nass River can resume.

April: Toonik Tyme (Aboriginal). Traditional Inuit games are played e.g.; fishing, hunting contests. This ceremony is usually celebrated the 3rd weekend in April.

April 1: Kha B’Nissan –New Year (Assyrian). Originally celebrated for 12 days, Assyrians place of bunch of green grass at the threshold of their homes to welcome fertility and prosperity in the New Year. On the 10th day, groups of new brides visit every house in their neighbourhood and receive presents.

April 1: Palm Sunday (Christianity) Please see the attachment.

April 3- 10: Pesach...Passover (Jewish). Commemorates the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. It begins with a ritual meal, Seder, when no leavened bread is consumed. Passover is celebrated for eight days with the first and the last 2 days are holidays.

April 5: Ch’ing Ming (China, Taiwan). A national holiday when observant customarily visit ancestral graves where traditional rites and offerings are made to honour one's ancestors. This unusual ancestral observance is related to the traditional Chinese need to receive blessing from the previous generations at the on-set of a new undertaking. The event, however, has the atmosphere of a picnic because the offered food is eaten at the various gravesites. It is not a solemn occasion, but rather, a time for happy communion with one's forefathers. Check with the communities in your locale for events and processions marking this event.

April 6: Good Friday (Christianity) Please see the attachment.

April 8: Easter (Christianity) Please see the attachment.

April 8: Pascha (Christianity Eastern/Orthodox) This year Easter and Pascha fall on the same date. Please see the attachment.

April 9: Easter Monday (Christianity) Please see the attachment..

April 14: Songkran (Buddhism) Southeast Asia, Songkran is recognized as the New Year for Buddhists. For Thais, it is a three-day religious festival in which homes are routinely cleaned, and water is sprinkled on monks paying visits and on statues of Buddha.

April 14: Baisakhi or Solar New Year (Hinduism). The first day of the solar year, this is an agricultural festival celebrating the harvest especially in North India. The festival is a mixture of feasting, dancing and worship. Check with the communities in your locale for events and processions marking this event.

April 14: Vaisakhi or Solar New Year (Sikhism) on this day in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th Guru, created the Khalsa Panth, the Brotherhood of the Pure, by removing the clerical system from Sikhism. By eliminating this system, Guru Gobind Singh Ji reaffirmed the direct connection between Sikhs and the Divine. Khalsa brothers are given the name Singh (lion) and sisters are named Kaur (princess). The festival is a mixture of feasting, dancing and worship. Check with the communities in your locale for events and processions marking this event.

April 15: Yom ha-Shoah (Jewish). Commemorates the death of 6 million Jews by the Nazi regime during the Second World War.

April 21: Ridvan (Bahá'í). This means paradise and the 12-day festival is the holiest time for the Bahá'ís. It commemorates the 12 days that Baha'u'llah spent in the Garden of Ridvan in the last days of his exile in Baghdad and announced that he was the prophet whose coming had been foretold. The Bahá'ís do not work on the first, ninth and twelfth day of Ridvan.

April 22: Earth Day (International). This is the world's premier global environmental celebration, held every year since 1970. Its purpose is to increase awareness, responsibility and action towards a clean, healthy future for all living things using events, campaigns, and networking as catalysts. Earth Day 2007 will highlight an inclusive global environmental theme, which will be promoted through educational and community learning materials on key issues such as climate change, forests, biodiversity water, and energy. This day offers a unique opportunity to join with other concerned citizens of the world who are working towards a sustainable future for all of us, Check with the communities in your locale for events marking this event.

April 23: St. George's Day (Christian). He is the patron saint of England, Egypt, Greece and Portugal. The Bulgarians and Macedonians celebrate it on May 6. The red cross on St. George's armour and white tunic is now the symbol of the International Red Cross and forms part of the Union Jack of UK and Northern Ireland.

April 24: Martyrs Day (Armenia). This solemn day commemorates the death of 1-1/2 million Armenians who were massacred in 1915-1916.

April 25: ANZAC Day (Australia, New Zealand). Commemorates the slain of their army cops in World War I.

April 26: Administrative Professionals Day (Canada, USA). On this day workplaces all over the country acknowledge secretaries, administrative staff and other support personnel for their contributions.

April 27-29: Gathering of Nations Pow Wow (Native American). Albuquerque, New Mexico is the venue of over 700 tribes and nations participating in a 3-day event where over 4000 participants share, teach, and exchange traditions.

Easter:

Easter is the most important religious holiday of the Christian liturgical year, observed in March, April, or May to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, which Christians believe occurred after his death by crucifixion in AD 27-33 (see Good Friday). *Easter* can also refer to the season of the church year, lasting for fifty days, which follows this holiday and ends at Pentecost.

Western Christianity

In Western Christianity, Easter marks the end of the forty days of Lent, a period of fasting and penitence in preparation for Easter which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends at Easter Sunday.

The week before Easter is very special in the Christian tradition: the Sunday before is Palm Sunday, and the last three days before Easter are Maundy Thursday or Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday (sometimes referred to as Silent Saturday). Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday respectively commemorate Jesus' entry in Jerusalem, the Last Supper and the Crucifixion. Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday are sometimes referred to as the Easter Triduum (Latin for "Three Days"). In some countries, Easter lasts two days, with the second called "Easter Monday". Many churches start celebrating Easter late in the evening of Holy Saturday at a service called the Easter Vigil.

Eastertide, the season of Easter, begins on Easter Sunday and lasts until the day of Pentecost, seven weeks later.

Eastern Christianity

In Eastern Christianity, preparations begin with Great Lent. Following the fifth Sunday of Great Lent is Palm Week, which ends with Lazarus Saturday. Lazarus Saturday officially brings Great Lent to a close, although the fast continues for the following week. After Lazarus Saturday comes Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and finally Easter itself, or Pascha (Πάσχα), and the fast is broken immediately after the Divine Liturgy. Easter is immediately followed by Bright Week, during which there is no fasting, even on Wednesday and Friday.

The Paschal Divine Liturgy generally takes place around midnight, into the early morning of Pascha. Placing the Paschal Divine Liturgy at midnight guarantees that no Divine Liturgy will come earlier in the morning, ensuring its place as the pre-eminent "Feast of Feasts" in the liturgical year.

Religious observation of Easter

Western Christianity

The Easter festival is kept in many different ways among Western Christians. The traditional, liturgical observation of Easter, as practiced among Roman Catholics and some Lutherans and Anglicans begins on the night of Holy Saturday with the Easter Vigil. This, the most important liturgy of the year, begins in total darkness with the blessing of the Easter fire, the lighting of the large Paschal candle (symbolic of the Risen Christ) and the chanting of the Exsultet or Easter Proclamation attributed to Saint Ambrose of Milan. After this service of light, a number of readings from the Old Testament are read; these tell the stories of creation, the sacrifice of Isaac, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the foretold coming of the Messiah. This part of the service climaxes with the singing of the Alleluia and the proclamation of the gospel of the resurrection. A sermon may be preached after the gospel. Then the focus moves from the lectern to the font. Anciently, Easter was considered the most perfect time to receive baptism, and this practice is alive in Roman Catholicism, as it is the time when new members are initiated into the Church, and it is being revived in some other circles. Whether there are baptisms at this point or not, it is traditional for the congregation to renew the vows of their baptismal faith. This act is often sealed by the sprinkling of the congregation with holy water from the font. The Catholic sacrament of Confirmation is also celebrated at the Vigil. The Easter Vigil concludes with the celebration of the Eucharist and Holy Communion. Additional celebrations are usually offered on Easter Sunday itself. Some churches prefer to keep this vigil very early on the Sunday morning instead of the Saturday night to reflect the gospel account of the women coming to the tomb at dawn on the first day of the week. Some churches read the Old Testament lessons before the procession of the Paschal candle, and then read the gospel immediately after the Exsultet.

In predominantly Roman Catholic Philippines, the morning of Easter (known in the national language as Pasko ng Muling Pagkabuhay or the Pasch of the Resurrection) is marked with joyous celebration, the first being the dawn Salubong, wherein large statues of Jesus and Mary are brought together to meet, imagining the first reunion of Jesus and his mother Mary after Jesus' Resurrection. This is followed by the joyous Easter Mass.

Eastern Christianity

Easter is the fundamental and most important festival of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox. Every other religious festival on their calendars, including Christmas, is at best secondary in importance to the celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord. This is reflected in the cultures of countries that are traditionally Orthodox Christian majority. Easter-connected social customs are native and rich. Christmas customs, on the other hand, are usually foreign imports, either from Germany or the USA. Eastern Rite Catholics in communion with the Pope of Rome have similar emphasis in their calendars, and many of their liturgical customs are very similar.

This is not to say that Christmas and other elements of the Christian liturgical calendar are ignored. Instead, these events are all seen as necessary but *preliminary* to the full climax of the Resurrection, in which all that has come before reaches fulfillment and fruition. Pascha (Easter) is the primary act that fulfils the purpose of Christ's ministry on earth—to defeat death by dying and to purify and exalt humanity by voluntarily assuming and overcoming human frailty. This is succinctly summarized by the Paschal Troparion, sung repeatedly during Pascha until the Apodosia of Pascha (which is the day before Ascension):

Celebration of the holiday begins with the "anti-celebration" of Great Lent. In addition to fasting, almsgiving, and prayer, Orthodox are supposed to reduce all entertainment and non-essential activity, gradually eliminating them until Holy Friday. Traditionally, on the evening of Holy Saturday, the Midnight Office is celebrated shortly after 11:00 pm. At its completion all light in the church building is extinguished. A new flame is struck in the altar, or the priest lights his candle from a perpetual lamp kept burning there, and he then lights candles held by deacons or other assistants, who then go to light candles held by the congregation. Entirely lit by candle, the priest and congregation process around the church building, re-entering ideally at the stroke of midnight, whereupon Matins begins immediately followed by the Paschal Hours and then the Divine Liturgy. Immediately after the Liturgy it is customary for the congregation to share a meal, essentially an agape dinner (albeit at 2.00 am or later!)

The Holy Fire in Jerusalem, celebrated on Holy Saturday, has been described as the oldest miracle-related ceremony in Christendom.

The day after, Easter Sunday proper, there is no liturgy, since the liturgy for that day has already been celebrated. Instead, in the afternoon, it is often traditional to hold "Agape vespers". In this service, it has become customary during the last few centuries for the priest and members of the congregation to read a portion of the Gospel of John (20:19–25 or 19–31) in as many languages as they can manage.

For the remainder of the week (known as "Bright Week"), all fasting is prohibited, and the customary greeting is "Christ is risen!", to be responded with "Truly He is risen!"