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Ways to celebrate Easter

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Eco Catholic

Most of us come back from Mass on Easter feeling uplifted from the experience. The full church adorned with colorful decorations, bright flowers, soaring Alleluias, the presence of family members usually absent, and perhaps an egg hunt for the kids, leaves us feeling as warm as the sunny spring morning.

After Mass is over, we generally move on to a special meal, watching TV, munching lots of candy, and interacting with the family (if we're fortunate in that line).

This year, before Easter comes and goes as usual, I invite you to think about ways to fashion your home festivities more in harmony with the life-giving values of the Risen Lord.

Let's start with Easter dinner, usually the highlight of the day. Often it's a very unhealthy meal, built around meat, rich and fatty foods, and lots of sweets, all the things the doctor tells us to avoid. Many times it's served on plastic plates because no one wants to wash dishes. Then there's the rest of the paper, plastic, and bottles thrown into the trash or perhaps recycled.

You might consider a more vegetarian or vegan meal this year. It seems a little ironic that we decry the slaying of Jesus the Lamb of God, and yet eat lamb, pork or other meat from an animal raised and slain in a cruel way. You might find it unthinkable not to serve meat on Easter, but I've done it for years and the world doesn't come to an end. Family members don't stalk out insulted or threaten to boycott the meal in years to come. In fact, my children and grandchildren have come to expect it and look forward to what creative dishes I've planned.

Ideas for healthy meals

You can always be sneaky and buy a non-meat Tofurky roast or something similar, and with enough gravy, they might not even know the difference. You can get plenty of vegan or vegetarian holiday recipes on line. If you season your food well, you don't need to use so much butter, salt, or sugar to make

it taste good. Lightly steaming fresh vegetables and seasoning them with Bragg liquid aminos (a healthy alternative to salt that tastes much like soy sauce, a product I can't live without) makes rich sauces unnecessary. Sweet potatoes are delicious baked, and don't need to be smothered in sugar, butter and marshmallows. And a green salad with a light vinegar and oil dressing beats jello cubes swimming in mayonnaise any day.

We all want our family members to leave the table feeling satisfied in body and spirit, not stuffed, uncomfortable and lethargic, which hardly makes for a stimulating and fun post-dinner experience. Also, if everyone eats lots of meat and animal products, they absorb its negative energy and are more likely to be at odds with each other. A simple, healthy meal however, can share its wholesomeness to those who partake of it and foster more family harmony.

Use real dinnerware

If possible, use real plates, glasses, and silverware. I went to a thrift store and bought an extra set of plates so I have enough on hand for bigger gatherings. Or ask guests to bring extra dinnerware. Washing dishes doesn't have to be a dreaded task, but an opportunity to build camaraderie and fun.

Skip the soda and go lightly on the alcohol

One can of soda has 10 teaspoons of sugar in it and is so acidic it leaches calcium from your bones to neutralize it in the bloodstream. And the cans and liter bottles require disposal. Alcohol is numbing and often a contributor to family disputes and arguments. I always serve the same two drinks at festive meals ? water and fresh lemonade. I juice the lemons, add purified water and sweeten it with stevia and a little bit of frozen 100% juice. Voila! Delicious, very healthy, almost no calories, and no harm to Earth.

Easter baskets

This can be a fun tradition for children, but we don't have to put fake grass in them or a bunch of candy. As kids, we always picked grass to line our pots and pans baskets. Some fruit, trinkets, pennies, or other treats would do just as well. Plastic egg hunts are always fun, and since I can't think of a good alternative to them, I guess our best bet is reusing the eggs year after year.

Get out in nature

Easter seems like a perfect day (weather permitting) to get outside and play games, visit a park, or talk a walk. We might as well get some exercise while we are visiting. And why not enjoy the budding and joyous life that greets us wherever we turn. Then maybe when the day is over, we will feel rejuvenated rather than stuffed, stressed, and tired.

A word about clothes

As a child, I remember fondly the new clothes I got at Easter ? a bright, frilly dress, new shoes, a hat (anybody remember those days?), and maybe even white gloves. This was a big deal because I usually wore a lot of hand-me-downs or home-sewn clothes. It was special because it was rare. Nowadays, we get new clothes every time we turn around. So maybe we don't need a new outfit, and could more wisely use the money for a charity that clothes the poor around the world.

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A few recipes

Lest you think I am the Easter Grinch, I want to share some recipes for healthier sweets. You may wonder, why all the trouble? Because sugar is very bad for us. Somebody has to take a stand and stop serving it non-stop to obese adults and hyperactive children, 1/3 of whom are projected to develop

diabetes in their lifetime.

Here is a recipe for one of my favorite deserts ?a delicious, ultra moist vegan carrot cake.

2 ¼ cups whole spelt flour (spelt is healthier than wheat, is more alkaline, and has less gluten)
2 teaspoons baking soda
1 teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon allspice
1 ½ teaspoons baking powder
¾ teaspoon salt
¾ cup agave
¼ cup finely chopped dates, preferable soaked ahead of time
¼ teaspoon stevia powder
1 teaspoon vanilla
2/3 cup canola oil
2 cups finely grated carrots
1 can (about 14 oz) crushed pineapple, drained
1 cup shredded coconut
½ cup chopped walnuts or pecans

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a medium bowl, mix flour, baking soda and powder, spices, and salt and set aside. In a large bowl, mix agave, dates, vanilla, and oil. Add carrots, pineapple, coconut, and nuts and stir. Add dry ingredients and mix. Put into a greased 9X9 or 9X13 pan and bake for 40-45 minutes until a toothpick comes out clean.

If you think candy is a must at Easter, here are some healthy alternatives. I mix peanut or almond butter with raisins, shredded coconut, sesame or sunflower seeds ground or whole, carob chips, vanilla, and agave. If I need a firmer consistency, I add soy milk powder, and then fashion them into balls and refrigerate, and they are good to go. You can eliminate or add ingredients as you choose.

I make another candy by using a half cup of rice or soy milk powder and adding some melted vegan butter, ground walnuts, vanilla, and agave. Use whatever proportions suit you. Add a little water if it's too dry, or more powder if too moist. Then press it into a small pan or plastic container, freeze, and then cut into squares and enjoy.

Take or leave my suggestions as you desire. No matter what, I hope you have a close encounter with the Risen Lord at worship and in your home celebration. Happy Easter!

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