

Remember to Hallow the Feasts

Six days for working and one day to celebrate. Sunday belongs to God. The Ukrainian family celebrates Sunday as do all Christian families across the world. The Holy Mass, lunch together and then everyone is free for personal questions.

I would like to tell you how we celebrate Holy Christmas and Easter in Ukranian families.

Christmas celebrations begin the previous day. The whole family is united around the same table for the Christmas Eve dinner. All children try to go to their parents' homes, some of them with their own families.

We pray and even the little ones participate. Dinner consists of 12 dishes without meat. All of them must be tasted. After dinner we sing Christmas songs. The children receive their presents. A bell rings: we open the door and a 'live' Crib scene enters. A group of young people every year ring at the door to bring the great news of the Nativity of our Lord. Early in the morning everyone goes to Holy Mass which lasts more than three hours. The celebrations continue for three days: Christmas, The Holy Family and St. Steven's.

On all three days we visit our families and friends and sing Christmas songs.

Over this period we all greet each other saying "CHRIST IS BORN" with the reply "GLORY TO CHRIST".

The convention that you spend Christmas with your family and Easter with whomever you want doesn't work in the Ukraine.

Easter too is celebrated in the family. It begins early in the morning with Holy Mass which, like at Christmas, lasts more than three hours. Each family prepares a well-decorated basket where they put the foodstuffs forbidden over Lent; salami, ham, eggs, cheese and Easter cake. This food is returned to the owners after mass. That way it can be eaten at home for lunch. Eggs with specially decorated shells are prepared for the feast. Once young people had competitions to see whose was the prettiest and also to see if the young lady was interested in the boy. He used to give her the egg and if the gift was accepted it meant that his attentions were not being refused. You could hope to find a girlfriend. Nowadays it is simply a game.

Easter celebrations too last for three days during which we dance in the main squares of the town, we visit our friends and relatives even if not invited, sing spring songs. Over Easter we greet each other saying CHRIST IS RESURRECTED and the reply is HE IS TRULY RESURRECTED.

With these words I end my tale of celebrations in the Ukraine. Here we try to maintain our traditions. We thank our Italian friends for their hospitality which gave us the opportunity to celebrate our Masses and to feel at home.

WITH GREAT RESPECT. OREST AND MARIYA VASIK, THE UKRANIAN COMMUNITY