

Moveable Feasts

There are some feasts that do not occur on the same day of the month every year, but occur sometime sooner or later. The celebration of these feasts depends on the feast of Pascha (Easter) which has no fixed date. Pascha can occur anytime between Mar 22 and April 25. Hence, the feasts dependent on the date of Pascha are called feasts with no fixed date, or moveable feasts. The centre of all moveable feasts is Pascha, and hence the cycle of moveable feasts is called the Paschal cycle. That is why the Sundays of the Church Year are named as Sundays after Pascha, e.g. 3rd Sunday after Pascha.

The Easter or Paschal Cycle

One who closely follows the Liturgical Year of our Church will readily perceive, that she re-lives each festal event in a deeply spiritual manner. This may be observed in our feastday services which, with their profound prayers, songs, hymns and symbolic rites, place before our eyes both the factual content and the deep theology of each feast. Therefore, it should not surprise us that the feastday services impress us so strongly and stir us to the depths of our souls. This is why the Church diligently prepares the faithful spiritually, psychologically and physically for every feast. The greater the feast, the greater and longer is the preparation for it, and the longer is the post-festal celebration.

This is why the feast of the Resurrection of our Lord, which is the greatest feast in the Year, requires an extraordinarily long preparation as well as a long post-festal celebration which is, as it were, a prolongation of the feast of Easter.

Historically, the Paschal or Easter cycle began to develop much earlier than the Christmas cycle, because the feast of the Pasch was in practice earlier than the feast of the Nativity of our Lord (Christmas). Hence, we shall say a little more about the Easter cycle, since with it, we shall begin a more detailed explanation of the Liturgical Year.

What Constitutes the Easter Cycle?

The Easter cycle begins with the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, ten weeks before Easter, and terminates eight weeks after Easter with the Sunday of All Saints. The Easter cycle is divided into pre-paschal, i.e., the season or period before Easter, and the Easter season.

The pre-paschal season consists of four Sundays preceding Lent. These are: the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, Sunday of the Prodigal Son, Meatfare and Cheesefare Sundays, and also the Great Fast or the Forty Days Fast — which extends from Cheesefare Sunday to Palm Sunday [sic], and finally, Passion Week — which is usually included in the Great Fast [sic].

The Easter cycle lasts from the Sunday of St. Thomas (the Sunday after Easter) to the Sunday of All Saints. The period from Easter to Pentecost embraces fifty days and is called by the common name of Pentecost. The Sundays in the Easter season are each named for the event recounted in the Gospel of that day. These occur in the following order: the Sunday of St. Thomas, the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women, the Sunday of the Paralytic, the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman, the Sunday of the Blind Man, the Sunday of the Fathers of the Church, the Sunday of the Descent of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost) and the Sunday of All Saints. The Easter season, i.e., the post-feast of the Resurrection, lasts forty days, that is, to the feast of the Ascension of our Lord.

The Easter cycle includes thirty two Sundays which follow in consecutive order and for this reason are called ordinary Sundays to distinguish them from the festal Sundays which have their own proper epistle and Gospel. There are a few such festal Sundays in the year, as for example, the Sunday before and after the Nativity of our Lord and the Sunday before and after the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. The ordinary Sundays begin with the Sunday of All Saints and end their cycle on the Sunday of Zaccheus which is followed by the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee. The number of these ordinary Sundays depends upon the date of Easter; that is, if Easter comes earlier then there will be more ordinary Sundays, if later, fewer ordinary Sundays.

The Spiritual Significance of the Paschal Cycle

The principal aim of the Paschal cycle, first of all, is to prepare our hearts and souls for a worthy encounter with the Risen Christ. We prepare ourselves for this joyful meeting by humble prayer, fasting, penance and meditation on the passion and sufferings of Christ. This preparation culminates in Easter Confession and Holy Communion. And so, with a pure heart, we go forth to meet the Risen Christ, singing the hymn of victory: "Christ is risen from the dead, by death He conquered death, and to those in the graves, He granted life."

The next aim of the Easter cycle is to have us participate in Christ's joy, victory and triumph, for, just as He rose from the dead, so we too, shall rise to new life. "For the hour is coming," says Christ, "in which all who are in the tombs shall hear the voice of the Son of God. And they who have done good shall come forth unto resurrection of life; but they who have done evil, unto resurrection of judgement" (John 5, 28).

Our re-enacting the Easter cycle is very closely related to the church services of that season. These services, depending on whether they bear a joyful or penitential character, put our souls in a joyful or penitential mood. The Easter season teaches us the great and salutary lesson of salvation history, namely, that there is no glorious resurrection without a Calvary; that, like Jesus Christ, we too, must pass through the Golgotha of our life, in order to enter into the joy of the everlasting Easter heaven.

Used with permission. Julian Katrij, OSBM. *A Byzantine Rite Liturgical Year*. Basilian Fathers Publication, Toronto, 1992, pp. 48-51.

Paschal Cycle

Pre-Lent	Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee Sunday of the Prodigal Son Meatfare Sunday Sunday of the Fearful Judgement Cheesefare Sunday Sunday of Forgiveness
Lent	First Sunday of Lent Sunday of Orthodoxy Second Sunday of Lent (Commemoration of St. Gregory Palamas) Third Sunday of Lent Veneration of the Holy Cross Fourth Sunday of Lent Commemoration of St. John Climacus Fifth Sunday of Lent Commemoration of St. Mary of Egypt
Great and Holy Week	Flower (Palm) Sunday The Lord's Entrance into Jerusalem

PASCHA

Glorious and Holy Sunday of the Resurrection of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ

Thomas Sunday
Third Sunday of Pascha Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women
Fourth Sunday of Pascha

Sunday of the Paralytic
Fifth Sunday of Pascha
Sunday of the Samaritan Woman
Sixth Sunday of Pentecost
Sunday of the Man Born Blind

Ascension

Ascension of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ (40th day after Pascha)

Seventh Sunday of Pascha
Sunday of the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council

Pentecost

Holy and Glorious Pentecost (50th day after Pascha)

First Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday of All Saints

All Sundays hereafter are numbered as after Pentecost



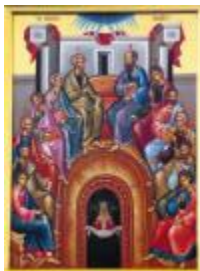
Pascha

The feast of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is calculated as the first Sunday after the first ecclesiastical full moon after the spring equinox.



Ascension

The feast of the Ascension of our Lord is celebrated on the 40th day of Pascha and therefore is always on a Thursday.



Pentecost

The feast of Pentecost is celebrated on the 50th day after Pascha. It commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit on the followers of Jesus in the Upper Room in Jerusalem.