

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Our Catholic faith is abundant with symbolism, sacraments and sacramentals. The more we understand them, the richer and deeper our participation in the faith will be. Some of the symbols and sacramentals are actually part of the furniture and fittings in the church. The Paschal Candle is an important one, for it is there not only at Easter, but throughout our journey of faith.

At the Easter Vigil the Holy Fire is blessed and the Paschal candle is lit and solemnly carried into the darkened church as the Holy Deacon sings out, "The Light of Christ!" To which all respond, "Thanks Be to God!"

The candle is then blessed with incense, and the ancient hymn The Exultet is sung praising God for his wondrous act of redemption through salvation history and recognizing the imagery of fire and light that symbolizes the Light of God's beauty, truth, and goodness in a sin darkened world.

During the Easter season the Paschal Candle remains by the pulpit and is lit at every Mass. It remains by the pulpit because the readings and preaching during the Easter season continue to proclaim the mighty light of the resurrected Lord. Now, at Pentecost the Paschal Candle is extinguished and moved to the heart of the church next to the font.

The symbolism continues because at Pentecost the fiery power and light of the resurrection comes down and dwells in our hearts and in the heart of the Church—which is the Body of Christ. The Paschal Candle stands by the font because it is through the waters of baptism that we are plunged into the saving death and resurrection of the Lord. When a child is baptized the Paschal Candle is lit again and a small candle is lit from the Paschal Candle and given to the godparents with the exhortation to help the child shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father. Thus, the Paschal Candle stands for the new light, new life, and new love that baptism imparts.

Finally, when there is a funeral Mass in church the Paschal Candle is moved again. This time to the head of the central aisle to stand like a sentinel in front of the coffin. Once again, the Paschal Candle symbolizes the resurrection and the life, but this time applied specifically to the person who has died. In the funeral Mass we claim God's promise for our departed brother or sister. We claim them for their Lord who died and rose again for them and claim the promise of their baptism when they too received the Light of Christ.

And to this we add our acclamation—as we do at the Easter Vigil: "Thanks be to God!"

Your Pastor,  
Fr. Longenecker