Maltese Easter Traditions

Lent is a forty-day period before Easter, at some point between Late March and Late April each year. A time for sole searching and repentance of reflection, penance and abstained.

Due of abstaining of meat housewives prepared other tasteful dishes - widow's soup ("soppa ta' l-gharmla"), vegetables soup ("minestra"), broad beans soup ("kusksu"), artichokes ("qaqoce"), herrings ("eringi"), cod ("bakkaljaw"), spinach fritters ("sfineg tal-ispinaci"), ricotta pie ("torta tal-irkotta"), anchovy pies ("qassatat ta' l-incova"), and Lenten bread ("ftira tar-randan").

In typical Maltese lent pastries, butter and eggs were not used as a sign of penitence - honey fritters ("sfineg tal-ghasel"), Lenten cakes ("kwarezimal"), carob sweets ("karamelli tal-harob"), and hot cross buns ("ħbejiet bis-salib"), they all are of exquisite taste.

Shove Tuesday, Fat Tuesday and Mardi Gras - meaning farewell to animals products, meat, milk, butter, eggs and cheese.

Ash Wednesday, adults fast and abstain from meats. Priest holds special service which puts ashes on the faithfuls head as a symbol of death and sorrow for sin. Children did not eat sweet as sign of penance. Pot and pants were put up side down as a sign of fasting.

In the 17th century, the Jesuits started Lenten Spiritual Exercises ("Pritki - Ezercizzji Spiritwali"), in preparation for the great feast of Easter. It is a tradition for people to gather in church to listen to short sermons will prepared by priests.

These exercises are scheduled over several weeks and usually ended with confession and Holy Mass. They are prepared for every category of people - married couples, youth and for unmarried people. Children spiritual exercises are held in schools.

On Friday before Palm Sunday ("Ħadd il-Palm"), very popular feast of Our Lady of Sorrows ("Festa ta' Marija Addolorata"), is celebrated in Malta.

A procession is held with the statue of Our Lady of Sorrow ("Id-Duluri"), in Valletta and other villages. With great devotion worshipers pray, sing hymns and sometimes devotes walk barefooted behind the statue as sign of sacrifice, to express gratitude for receiving a special grace.

Palm Sunday always falls on the Sunday before Easter. All the parishes churches bless palm leaves and olive branches with blessed water. Faithful participate in a procession waving palm and olives breaches.

Traditional blessed palm leaves tied into crosses were distributed to the worshipers. People also took small branches of olive leaves to keep as a blessing.
Maltese used barn olive leaves to fumigate ("tbahhar"), and with great devotion they recite various prayers to ward off the evil eye ("għajn hażina"), and illness from their house and family.

**Particular Prayers**

San Barnabaw, jekk f'din id-dar

Hawn xi għajn Hażina

Kecciha ! barra minn hawn

From Palm Sunday till Good Friday traditional Jewish Passover Meal tables, decorative tables with plates representing popular symbols from the bible and the passion of Christ made with salt, pasta, rice or semolina and miniature statues of Christ's Passion are displayed to the public in small chapels, houses and halls.

English version - The Passover Meal and The Last Supper Table - ("Grupp Mejda ta' l-Appostil Mellieha"), - http:www.mellieha.com/lastsupper/

Holy Thursday also known as Maundy Thursday ("Hamis ix-Xirka"), is commemorated with the Last Supper ("l-Aħħar Cena"), after the washing of the feet of the Disciples an Apostles' Ring ("qagħaq tal-Appostle"), made of unleavened bread with honey is given to the representative of the Apostles. A sign of eternal live and holy Christianity.

After the late Mass, the celebrant carries the Blessed Sacrament from the high Altar to the Altar of Repose, ("Is-Sepulkru"), decorated with angels, beautiful fresh flowers and rows on rows of candles in small and tall candle-stick.

Worshipers pray in groups in front of the Blessed Sacrament. Many families have the habit to visit seven churches reciting prayers and admire the decorated Altars of Ropes.

Good Friday ("l-Ġimgħa il-Kbira"), a day of fasting and obligation not to meat. Children fasten from sweets. In the olden days many people fasten with bread and water only. On other fasten days, in the morning they were aloud three pieces of bread with some jam and coffee. They drank water to fill their stomach during the day. For lunch they had soup and fruit. At dinner they eat a full meal.

At 3p.m. a special Mass is celebrated in all churches to commemorate the time when Jesus died. In many villages a procession with various artistic statues of Christ's passion are carried on shoulders by men in white robe. Children and adults parade along with the statues all dressed up as Biblicists figures, Romans soldiers, Jewish attire and other personages connected with the Passion of the Christ.

The procession will be accompanied with the rhythmically beating of the drums or the band playing funeral marches. In many procession men walk behind the statues dress in white robe, eye-slits hood and carry heavy wooden crosses. Sometimes devotes walk barefoot and even drag
heavy chains (by weight), to their ankles, in fulfillment of some vow for favours received though divine intercession.

Easter is the most important religious feast of the Christen liturgical year. Early morning the Church bells cheer the message of Jesus's resurrection from the dead three days after his crucifixion.

Families and friends get together for lunches or picnics. Children enjoy eating the "Figolla" or Easter eggs. On this particular day father's put up a swing made with a thick rope on a tree in their yard or in the country.

*Maltese Proverbs - Qwiel Matin*

Naghġa wara l-Ghid 'k tara l-botbot taqbeż il-hajt - After Easter when an ewe sees a ram, she will leap over the well.

Easter time is not the right time for mating of sheep.