



## **The History and Tradition Of Easter in ITALY**

**The historic event that decided when we celebrate Easter in the Catholic tradition was the First Nicene Council of Christian Bishops in 325 A. D. Roman Emperor, Constantine, convened this council in Nicaea which is a part of Turkey. It was here that the decision was made to celebrate Easter on the first Sunday after the first full moon to rise after the Spring Equinox. Unless the first full moon also rose on a Sunday, in which case Easter would be celebrated the Sunday after that. Wow, I hope you understand that because I am not sure I do. Anyway, let's continue.**

**For over 1600 years, we have continued to mark the celebration of Easter based on these calculations. Although Carnevale officially starts in January and lasts up until Ash Wednesday, the last three days before lent are especially festive. Carnevale is best compared to Shrove Tuesday, Mardi Gras and Martedì Grasso. Pancakes are a traditional Shrove Tuesday feast food in Italy. Older Church Doctrines decreed that Catholics give up more than meat dishes for Lent. Eggs, milk and even fats were also restricted for the observant. Because Shrove Tuesday is the last day that people could spoil themselves until Easter, Pancakes soon became a traditional Food for the feast. There was also a practical reason for it. The people needed to use the dairy products and fats so they wouldn't go to waste, the same as meat, because for the next 40 days they were fasting from these foods. The refrigerator freezer would not be invented for centuries, but the tradition continues.**

**Lent (Quaresima) marks the forty days of fast and abstinence before Easter. Lent is also marked with the feast of St. Joseph (La Festa Di San Giuseppe) on March 19TH and Palm Sunday (Domenica della Palme). On Palm Sunday, many Churches in Italy still follow the tradition of having the priest knock three times from the outside of the Church doors to symbolize Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.**

**Holy Friday (Venerdì Santo) is often marked in the churches with a ritual of washing the feet, with the priest symbolizing the role of Jesus and twelve church members symbolizing the role of the Apostles.**

**Easter Sunday begins with a bang in Florence, quite literally. The three hundred year old traditional "Explosion of the Cart" (Scoppio del Carro) has roots in the pagan ritual of ensuring a good harvest. Today it is considered a spreader of good luck for the city of Florence.**

**Traditional Easter meals vary from region to region, but eggs and roasted Lamb are common staples everywhere. Eggs represent life, fertility and renewal. These are all essential symbols of Easter. Dyed eggs grace many tables and they are found in soups and in the traditional Easter pie (Torta Pasqualina). Roasted lamb is the symbol of birth and the Shepard. Chocolate bunnies are not common in Italy but beautifully decorated chocolate eggs are a traditional Easter treat and gift.**

**The official Easter cake is the Eastern Dove (Colomba) that represents peace. Pizza Rustica, Pizza Chiena (or as many in the US call it – “Pizza Gaina”), Pastiera di Grana, Pastiera di Riso etc. are all Easter specialties from the Southern part of Italy.**

**Easter Monday, also known as Little Easter (Pasquetta) is also an official Italian Holiday. It is often spent enjoying the spring weather with family and friends at picnics. The “Racing of the Egg” (Palio dell’Uovo) is a traditional Easter Monday game in the town of Trezzio in the Emilia-Romagna region. In Barano d’ Ischia, a traditional Island dance called the “Festa della Ndrezzata takes place on the same day.**

**So, as in all Italian holidays, Easter is a lengthy and festive time in Italy with much eating and merriness. Italians are certainly a people who love to party. We should be proud to call ourselves Italian/Americans.**

**Buona Pasqua**

**Gathered from various Internet sites. Adapted and submitted by Salvatore J. Mangano, PNP. 2009-2010 Italian Heritage and Culture Chair.**