

In a family with 16 kids, surviving Easter was a joy



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Every kid looks forward to a basket of candy and egg hunt on Easter, but with 16 kids our parents learned to improvise. First, they were not about to make up a dozen or so Easter baskets every year. So, our mother instituted making a massive Easter candy basket replete with jellybeans, marshmallow bunnies, chocolate crosses, and small coconut eggs. While it sat in the middle of the dining room table for communal use, it was never clear when the candy could be eaten. But with so many kids around, one could snatch a few pieces and simply blame it on another sibling. Investigating the infraction was too exhausting for our parents.

The big treat was our very own two-piece milk chocolate egg in which we could hold other candy. The hunt experience for our own Easter egg depended on age. Hiding the youngest kids’ eggs was easy. Hide it in a place to make it interesting, but not too hard to have the sibling crying. To avoid such risk, we simply left those eggs for our father to hide. The middle kids had it the hardest. The older kids were allowed to hide these eggs; therefore, anything goes. They reveled in having us spend the morning hunting for the eggs. A middle kid is young enough to be interested in having a chocolate egg, from which you could get more candy stored, but old enough to not cry foul to the parents, if unable to find the egg that the older siblings hid.

The older kids got an egg nominally, but several donated theirs to the main basket or gave it to a younger sibling to break out late spring. An added variable was that with so many eggs “on the street,” we could easily stumble onto someone else’s egg. It was verboten to take an egg with another’s name on it. But an unorthodox and unsanctioned practice occurred whereby if another person’s egg was found, the finder would transfer it to another — usually much more difficult — place. If the older sibling took mercy on the younger kid who vowed to “give up” on the hunt, he or she went to fetch the egg from where it was cleverly hidden. Unfortunately in most cases, it was gone. The one who appropriated the egg would not fess up,

claiming paybacks from a prior year of emotional duress when it was done to him or her. There was really no one to adjudicate the Easter egg hunt shenanigans. We dared not to bother our mother with such a mundane problem when she still felt the pressure of entertaining a small battalion for Easter dinner. Nor would we dare to complain to our father as he would retell the Passion story, yet again, and ask if not finding your egg was really a serious matter.

If we were lucky to find our egg that year, there was another challenge. Our father would fill our “hallow eggs” with other candy, if we answered his questions correctly. These were not warm and fuzzy questions about Peter Cottontail. These were hard-core questions about the Passion, historical Jesus, Catholic symbolism, and even theology. Before you got a question, our father conducted his mini history and physical to judge the level of difficulty, such as how old are you, what grade are you in, what are you studying in religion class, etc.

But we learned there was only one level to his questions—difficult. Consider these for example: What were the seven sayings that Jesus Christ uttered while he was hanging on the cross? Name the five sorrowful mysteries in order. Explain the transfiguration. What was the number of Roman soldier whips sanctioned to criminals during the time of Jesus’s crucifixion? What was the inscription on top of the crucifix and what does it mean? What was telling of the Biblical report “... and out poured water and blood” after Jesus was stabbed by a Roman lance? Needless to say, the candy fill line did not move quickly.

One year, one of the older boys thought he would be smart and lay prostrate in the candy line to get psyched for the questions. When asked by our father what he was doing, he said he was “praying by prostate.” Being a gastrointestinal physician, our father laughed. However, that trick bought him a week’s stay with the Trinity Missionaries during the summer.

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