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The Gracious Hostess Knows

RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS CONCERNING FOOD

by *Ann Baur*

Foods and Nutrition Sophomore

A GRACIOUS HOSTESS understands and respects the different customs and religious beliefs of her guests. She serves food which is in accord with their traditions.

She knows that on Fridays her Catholic friends do not eat meat from warm-blooded animals or fowl or the soup made from them. This is their way of giving up something for Christ. Three other days of fast and abstinence, which we as hostesses should remember, are the day before Christmas, Ash Wednesday and the Saturday before Easter.

Abstinence is different than fasting. It refers to the kind of food allowed. Fasting means less food. Lent, for Catholics and other religious groups, is a time of fast and abstinence. These weeks are set aside in preparation for the great feast of Easter. Adults eat one full meal and two half meals (together these must not exceed in quantity the full meal) and meat is allowed only at the principal meal.

Our Jewish friends eat only kosher food, which means ceremonially clean according to Jewish law. Meats must be slaughtered by special people of the Jewish faith in order that it is done according to the law of the Bible. "The Lord said to Moses, 'Say to the people of Israel, You shall eat no fat, of ox, or sheep, or goat. The fat of an animal that die of itself, and the fat of one that is torn by beasts, may be put to any other use, but on no account shall you eat it. Moreover, you shall eat no blood whatever, whether of fowl or of animal.'"

Leviticus and Deuteronomy give specific directions to the Jewish people regarding meat: "Of animals living on dry ground, only those are eaten which chew their cud and divide their hoofs, of the animals living in the water, only those are eaten which have scales and fins." This is why Jewish guests should not be served pork.

Nothing made of milk in any form, like butter or cheese, is used by the Jewish people in the same meal with meat or fat of any kind, except fish. The Old Testament says, "You shall not boil a kid in the mother's milk." In orthodox Jewish homes, therefore, gingerale, coffee, or tea is the beverage accompanying a meat dish.

Laws Based on Scientific Principles

These laws, based on scientific principles, were given to the primitive Israelites as religious dogmas. Because of the sanitary conditions of the time, trichinea-infected pork, milk and meat combinations and disease-carrying, scaleless fish were unhealthy foods. The people obeyed the laws although they did not understand scientific facts. Modern science has improved food conditions since the days of Moses, but many Jewish families choose to follow the old laws because of habit or respect to their faith.

The Passover commemorates the deliverance of ancient Israel from Egyptian slavery. All vegetables, except legumes, are used. Meats are permitted, but no flour is used with them in cooking. Fresh fruits and dairy products are specially prepared and labeled "For Passover Use."

Yom Kippur Day is the solemn Holy day of the Jewish calendar. It is the Day of Atonement, and a complete fast begins at sundown on the evening before and ends at sundown the next day. No food or water is taken for 24 hours.

Special foods are eaten at Christmas time in memory of Christ by many religious groups. Almond foods, such as cookies, are children's food, so these are made to honor the Christ Child. Years ago plum pudding was dedicated to the sun, but when Christ came it was dedicated to Him. Christmas breads are always popular; the most famous being the stollen which represents the Christ Child.

Carnival Season Opens Lent

After Christmas, from January 6 to Ash Wednesday, is the carnival season. This is the last celebration before the fast and abstinence of Lent, which starts on Ash Wednesday and continues through Easter. The final day of this dancing, feasting and merrymaking season is called "Mardi Gras" or "fat Tuesday." During the pre-Lenten days the thrifty English and Scottish people tried to use all the milk and eggs which wouldn't keep the 40 days of Lent. These foods supplied all the ingredients for pancakes, so the traditional Shrove Tuesday pancake supper was originated.

The bread eaten on Good Friday, hot cross buns, follows an old English custom of marking the sign of salvation. The traditional meat for Easter dinner is lamb, in memory of Christ, the Lamb of the World. Herbs are also used and round cookies showing the never ending circle of Christ.

These are many of the customs of different religious groups. They are for each of us, as homemakers and hostesses, to know and observe to make our guests feel comfortable in our homes.