Introduction

Holy Week, the heart of the Catholic faith, commemorates the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ. But how did this celebration originate? Was it a spontaneous creation of the Church, or does it have deeper roots? Contrary to the mistaken claim that it merely adapted pagan festivals, Holy Week is firmly rooted in Jewish tradition, apostolic teachings, and divine revelations carefully guarded by the early Church.

1. The Jewish Passover and Its Fulfillment in Christ

The immediate origin of Holy Week lies in the *Jewish Passover (Pesach)*, which celebrates Israel's liberation from Egypt (Exodus 12). Jesus Christ, the *Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world* (John 1:29), chose this very feast to offer Himself in sacrifice.

- **The Last Supper was a Passover Seder**: Jesus did not abolish Passover but *transformed* it into the Eucharist, instituting the priesthood and the commandment of love.
- **St. Paul confirms this**: *"Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed"* (1 Corinthians 5:7).

2. The Celebration in the Early Church

From the 1st century onward, Christians—many of them Jewish converts—continued celebrating Passover but with a new meaning: **Christ was the true Lamb**.

- **The Apostolic Fathers** (such as St. Ignatius of Antioch) spoke of the *"Lord's Passover."*
- **The Date Controversy**: Some communities in Asia Minor observed Passover on *Nisan 14* (like the Jews), while Rome insisted on *Sunday* (the day of Resurrection). The Council of Nicaea (325 AD) settled the matter, establishing the current calculation.

3. Were There Pagan Influences? A Debunked Myth

Some accuse the Church of "copying" pagan festivals (like those of Attis or Mithras), but:

- **The date is no coincidence**: Christ died during the Jewish Passover, not a Roman holiday.
- **The theology is radically different**: Pagan cults spoke of cyclical myths; Christianity proclaims a *unique historical event*: Christ truly died and rose again!
- **The Church purified customs but did not invent them**: For example, the *Easter*

egg symbolizes the Resurrection (it is not of pagan origin, as sometimes claimed).

4. Liturgical Development: From the Vigil to Modern Holy Week

In the early centuries, Easter revolved around a *great nighttime vigil* (with baptisms and the Eucharist). Over time, the Church added:

- **The Paschal Triduum** (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday), defined by the Council of Trent.
- **Processions**, which emerged in the Middle Ages to *meditate on Christ's journey*.
- **Lenten fasting**, a penitential preparation (since the 4th century).

5. What the Church Has Always Preserved

Despite external changes, the essence remains:

- **The Eucharist**, instituted on Holy Thursday.
- **The redemptive sacrifice of Good Friday**.
- **The joy of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday**.

Conclusion

Holy Week is not a human invention but a *divine gift*, faithfully transmitted by the Church. As St. Augustine wrote: *"Let us celebrate the feast, not with the old leaven, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth"* (1 Corinthians 5:8).

Why is this important to remember? In a world that relativizes faith, knowing the *sacred origin* of our traditions strengthens Catholic identity and unites us with the martyrs who died for this truth.