Introduction: A Mystery That Repeats Every Year

Why do we celebrate Easter on a different date each year? Why does it sometimes fall in March and other times in April? Why doesn't it always match the Orthodox Easter? These are questions many Catholics ask without realizing that behind these variations lie centuries of history, complex astronomical calculations, and a profound spiritual message. In this article, we'll dive into the fascinating world of the **Paschal Calendar**, exploring its roots, development, theological dimension, and relevance to our faith today.

I. The Origin of the Paschal Calendar: Between History and Revelation

1. The Jewish Passover: The Starting Point

It all begins with the **Jewish Passover (Pesach)**, which commemorates the liberation of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Jesus, as a devout Jew, celebrated this feast with His disciples in what we know as the Last Supper. Thus, the Christian Paschal Mystery (the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ) became intimately linked to this festival.

2. The Challenge of Unifying the Date

From the earliest centuries of Christianity, one essential question arose:
When should we celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord?
Some Christians in Asia Minor celebrated Easter on the 14th of Nisan (a fixed date in the Jewish calendar), regardless of the day of the week. Others, especially in Rome, insisted that it should always be celebrated on **the Sunday following that date**, in honor of the day of the Resurrection. This dispute became known as the **Quartodeciman Controversy**.

The **Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.)**, one of the most important councils in Church history, established a universal rule:

> ***The Christian Easter would be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox.***

II. The Computus: How the Date of Easter Is Calculated

1. What Is the Computus?

The **Computus** is the set of astronomical and mathematical rules and calculations the Church uses to determine the date of Easter each year. The term comes from the Latin *computare*, meaning "to calculate."

This calculation is not simple, as it combines **solar and lunar elements**, linking the civil (solar) calendar with the rhythms of the Jewish (lunar) calendar.

The basic formula is:

> ***Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon (known as the Paschal full moon) after the spring equinox (March 21).***

This means Easter can fall between **March 22 and April 25**.

2. Solar vs. Lunar Calendars

- **Solar calendar**: follows the sun's cycle. Example: the Gregorian calendar (the one we use today), with 365 days and leap years.
- **Lunar calendar**: follows the moon's phases. Example: the Jewish or Islamic calendars.

Christianity adopted a **synthesis of both systems**: fixing the equinox (solar) but using the full moon (lunar) to determine the Easter date.

3. The Role of Gauss's Algorithm

The German mathematician **Carl Friedrich Gauss**, in the 19th century, developed a **mathematical algorithm** to calculate the date of Easter in any given year of the Gregorian calendar.

This algorithm takes into account:

- The Metonic cycle (every 19 years, the moon phases repeat on the same calendar dates)
- The golden number of the year
- Specific corrections within the Gregorian calendar

Although today we have pre-established tables and technology to automate these calculations, Gauss's algorithm was a great contribution to understanding the complex Paschal Computus.

III. The Difference Between Catholic and Orthodox Easter

1. Two Calendars, Two Dates

Catholics follow the **Gregorian calendar**, established by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 to correct astronomical discrepancies in the Julian calendar (used since the time of Julius Caesar).

The Orthodox Church, in most cases, **still follows the Julian calendar**. Since this calendar is 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar, the date of the spring equinox and the full moon are calculated differently.

2. Result: Different Easter Dates

As a result, even though both traditions use the same formula, **Orthodox and Catholic Easter rarely fall on the same date**. In some years they are one or two weeks apart, and in others they coincide.

3. A Future in Common?

In recent decades, ecumenical dialogues between Catholics and Orthodox have aimed to **unify the date of Easter**. Pope Francis has expressed his desire to find a common date as a sign of Christian unity. However, no definitive agreement has yet been reached.

IV. Theological and Pastoral Meaning of the Paschal Calendar

1. More Than a Date: An Event

The fact that Easter has no fixed date reminds us of something profound:

> ***The Resurrection is not simply an anniversary. It is an Event that transcends time.***

Celebrating Easter is not just remembering a past event, but **renewing the living experience of the Risen One**, who continues to act in our lives and in history.

2. A Sacred Time That Transforms Everything

The liturgical calendar revolves around Easter. From it, we derive:

- **Lent** (40 days of preparation)
- **The Easter Season** (50 days until Pentecost)
- The **entire liturgical cycle**, enriched with movable feasts like Ascension and Corpus Christi

Thus, the Paschal calendar **marks a spiritual rhythm**, guiding us through a path of conversion, dying to sin, and rising to new life.

3. A Pedagogy of God

In His divine pedagogy, God teaches us that the Christian life is a **cyclical journey**, where time does not repeat meaninglessly, but rather **each year we climb one more step into the Paschal Mystery**.

Easter reminds us that **there is always a Sunday after every Good Friday**, that death does not have the final word, and that God’s love is renewed every year for each one of us.

V. Conclusion: A Spiritual Compass for Our Times

In a world increasingly disconnected from sacred rhythms, **the Paschal calendar is a compass that points us back to what truly matters**. It teaches us to look to the sky to understand the earth, to contemplate the moon and the sun not just as celestial bodies, but as silent witnesses to the history of salvation.

This ancient Computus, this millennia-old calculation, remains today a **spiritual journey**, a call to enter the Mystery of Christ with an open heart.

May each Easter we celebrate not be just a date on the calendar, but a living renewal of our faith, an experience of Resurrection, and an opportunity to be born again.