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WELCOMING THE BISHOP WITH BREAD, SALT, AND FLOWERS!

When people visit our homes we give them a warm welcome, offer them something to eat and drink, sometimes greet them with a bouquet of fresh flowers. We see to it that they are comfortable and happy in our company. Our Eastern European ancestors have an additional custom whereby they offer their visitors some bread and salt to eat. Guests are presented with either a slice of bread if they are unexpected, or a loaf specially made for them! They must break off a piece and dip it into the salt that is provided for them and take a bite of it right away to avoid insulting their hosts. After the guests have tasted the salted bread, everyone in the household can share it!

Now, everyone loves to get flowers. But why bread and salt? A 16th century Russian homekeeping almanac called the Domostroy mentions that all guests to someone's home were to be greeted with bread and salt as a sign of welcome, but the custom goes back even farther than that among the Slavic people.

Bread is a staple in nearly every household of every culture! By offering bread to your guest, you are showering him with the abundance of your household. Offering salt is considered a sign of great hospitality indeed, but more importantly it symbolizes the extending of protection over the guest and the purity of their friendship, since salt is often blessed to ward away evil. People to this day offer a gift of bread and salt to friends such as new neighbors, newlyweds, and those who just drop by to say hello. So when a dignitary such as the Bishop of the Eparchy comes as a visitor to your parish, it is customary for a representative of the congregation, often young children in ceremonial dress, to greet him immediately with flowers and a loaf of bread and salt.



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