
Church Sacraments

A sacrament is a rite which not only signifies some specific grace, but which produces that grace in the souls of the person to whom it is administered.

What is grace?

It is that which makes us fulfil our mission as children of God. It is a power that comes from God and regenerates and nourishes. It is the energy that feeds the growth of the believing spirit of people.

The Armenian word for sacrament is khorhoort or "mystery".

A sacrament is therefore an outward expression of faith that reflects an inward change.

There are seven sacraments of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Baptism is the Sacrament through which the believer is absolved of sins, is regenerated by the Holy Spirit, becomes a Christian and attains adoption by God. "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

Confirmation is a sacrament, in which a baptised person receives the gifts of the Holy Spirit, when he is anointed with chrism (holy water). Confirmation takes place immediately after the baptism.

Penitence is a sacrament, in which a person, who confesses his sins, receives forgiveness from the priest being invisibly released from his sins by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Holy Communion is a sacrament by which the believer receives Christ's Body and Blood in the form of bread and wine for remission of sins and the reception of eternal life.

Marriage is the consecration of the union between a man and a woman for life in lawful marriage. By mutual accord of the man and the woman, they are united together with a spiritual bond to each other and to the Church.

Holy Orders is the sacrament whereby through ordination, men receive the power and grace to perform the sacred duties of a clergyman of the Church.

Unction (Anointing) of the Sick is officiated upon people who are very ill and rely on God's mercy and belief that the Holy Oil will quicken the recovery.

Church Vessels

Vessels are particular items and linens that are used on the holy table (Altar) and in the church for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

Tasdarag (Sudarium) is a fine linen used to hold sacred objects during the Liturgy and at other times. It is used to show the sacredness of the object held, and that holy things should be held clean of sinful contact.

Dzadzgots (Veil) is a square embroidered linen or other fine material, to cover the chalice and the paten completely from top to base. The veil symbolises the hidden mystery of the Sacrament of Communion.

Gorpoora (C corporal) is a square linen or other material, usually white on which the chalice is placed during the Liturgy. Representing the shroud in which our Lord's body was wrapped at his burial.

Tashginag (Towel) is an oblong piece of linen, sometimes hung on the Kodi of the priest at the right side, and sometimes carried with the ewer [tall vessel containing water for hand-washing], for the purpose of drying the hands of the Celebrant after ablutions during the Liturgy. It indicates spiritual cleanliness.

Goozh or Gonk (Ewer/Basin or Bowl) are vessels used for washing the Priest's hands during and at the end of the Liturgy. Washing is symbolical of spiritual cleansing.

Mas (Antidoron) is very thin unleavened bread of wheat, of any reasonable size making it possible to be baked on a metal tray. It can be made by any member of the congregation. It is often used after being softened by spraying water on it. It is distributed after the Liturgy to those of the congregation who have not received communion. Mas symbolises the bond of love among the members of the church.

Nshkhar (Wafer) which means "a fraction" is the bread prepared for holy communion. It is a small thin loaf, made of unleavened dough of pure wheat and without salt. It should be stamped so as to have the figures of the crucifix and of ears of wheat and a cluster of grapes in relief, and baked just short of getting brown. It is a single loaf in token of the church and of the One Lord Jesus Christ (1Corinthians 10:17). It is unleavened, symbolising the purity of the Faith.

Sgih (Chalice) is a semi-spherical gold plated silver cup on a stem and base. The cup must be of such a shape that could allow the wafer to be easily immersed in the wine for the offering of Holy Communion by the Celebrant.

Maghzma (Paten) is a small round tray, from one to two inches wider in diameter than the mouth of the chalice, and made so as not to slide away from the top of the chalice, upon which it is placed.

Ashdanag (Candlestick) can be of various sizes and forms. There should be twelve candlesticks on the gradins [steps] of the Altar and two on the Altar itself. Two large and tall candlesticks should stand on either side of the Bema. Candlesticks represent the saints, who uphold Christ's light enlightening the world.

Jajanch (Ostensorium, "Radiance") is a round or oval disc of silver, surrounded by rays of metal, and fixed on a stem and base. Sometimes a relic is placed in the centre of the disc, which is always carved or decorated with various sacred signs or figures. It is often used simply as an ornament on the Altar, symbolising the spiritual power radiating from holy things.

Gantegh (Lamp) These are glass bowls, sometimes of different colours, suspended by three chains and hung from the ceiling in the Church. The bowls, in which olive oil is burnt, are often placed on large and finely wrought holders of precious metal, serving as ornaments. A lamp should always be hung over the Main Altar and it should remain perpetually lighted, if possible. Lamps symbolise the divine light enlightening the world.

Badger (Image or Picture) No statues in any form are allowed in the Armenian Church, and in the Armenian Church unlike other oriental churches, icons are always oil paintings on canvas. They should be few in the church and should represent the divine figures or saints or sacred events. On the Main Altar there should always be the Theotokos [a title of Mary, the mother of Jesus], seated on a throne with Child Jesus on her knees or in her arms on her left, holding a sceptre in her right hand. There is often a globe on the knee of the Child Jesus with a cross on it, and the right hand of Jesus is in a blessing position. Pictures are venerated in the Church as vehicles of spiritual discernment.

Poorvar (Censer) is a silver incense burner, in the shape of a bowl, which is suspended by chains connected to a small disc holding them. The bowl rests on a firm base, and has a perforated cone-shaped lid. Three of the chains hold the bowl, and a fourth is connected to the top of the lid in order to lift it. The lid could be decorative in the shape of the dome of an Armenian Church. The censer symbolises the human soul, in which the spiritual fire burns its worldly desires and sends up its prayers to God as a pleasing fragrance.

Kshots (Fan or Flabellum) is a disc of silver, about eight or nine inches in diameter, with the figure of a six-winged cherub made on each side of it in relief and with little ball-shaped bells, often twelve in number, attached all round the rim of the disc. The fans were usually used to drive flies or other insects away from the cup. They also symbolized cherubs driving evil spirits away from the sacred place. It is now used decoratively, as a musical instrument and with the like symbolism.

Source: Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church – Tiran Abp Nersoyan

Church Vestments

In the Armenian Church, part of the physical preparation for the Divine Liturgy is vesting of the priest when he puts on vestments which show he is God's special servant about to begin a sacred path. As the priest puts on each vestment, he says a special prayer successively asking for salvation, righteousness, cleanliness of heart, faith and strength to serve God.

Vestments Worn in the Divine Liturgy.

Shabig (Alb) is a long extending tunic down to the ankle. The Celebrant's Shabigworn during the Divine Liturgy is always plain and made of white linene. It is the first vestment to be put on beneath the others. It shows the gladness of spirit with which the priest must approach the Lord's Table. The white Shabig also symbolises purity.

Poroorar (Stole) is about nine inches wide and four feet six inches long. It is of the same material as the cope. At one end it has an opening for the neck and it hangs down in front over the Shabig. It is in fact the deacon's stole worn round the neck with the two stripes.

Kodi (Zone or Cincture) is a band of about two or three inches wide and long enough to go round the waist. Usually it is of the same material as the cope. It has a buckle in front. It is worn by the celebrant over the Shabig and Poroorar, at the waist. It symbolises faith which gives strength to the soul and the priestly authority of binding and loosing.

Pazban (Maniple or Cuff) is about five or six inches wide and long enough to go round the fore part of the forearm, over the sleeves of the alb (Shabig). It is of the same material as the cope. Pazbans are worn by the celebrant during the Divine Liturgy, symbolising moral cleanliness as well as strength which enable Christians to serve the Lord.

Vagas (Superhumeral or Amice) is a hard flexible piece, covered with the same material as that of the cope, or of a colour to match with the cope or the crown. It has a linen piece, long enough so that one end is attached to the top edge of the Vagas from inside. The cope is put on this hanging piece of linen, so that the Vagasis kept well in place. The Vagas symbolises righteousness in obedience to Christ as against the "stiffness of the neck", and also the "blocking" of temptations from view and hearing.

Shoorchar (Cope) is a piece, semi-circular in shape and made of fine rich material of any colour or colours, provided one colour is dominating. The Shoorchar is worn

by a priest or bishop during the Divine Liturgy. It is also worn during other services for reading the Gospel or for special solemnities. Symbolically it represents the glory of the new spiritual life and of the faith, as shield and defence against the attacks of the Evil One.

Saghavard (Crown or Helmet) is a tall bulbous headdress, covered with fine rich silk or velvet cloth. The crown is worn by the Celebrant at certain times during the Liturgy. It symbolises the salvation of the soul from the bondage of the spiritual enemy and the royal attribute of Christ the King, whom the priest represents, enabling the Christian to fight against the Evil One.

Vestments of Bishops

Emiporon (Pallium) is worn as part of the vestment of the Divine Liturgy. It is a long riband with a width of about nine inches and a length of about thirteen or fourteen feet, made of fine rich material, often with embroidered ornaments on it. It is wrapped round the shoulders with buttons and loops in such a way that one end hangs in front down to the ankles, and the other end hangs at the back again down to the ankles. There are four crosses, usually embroidered, on the omophorion: one on either shoulder, one on the front part and one on the part that hangs at the back. It represents the fullness of Episcopal authority.

Ardakhoorag (Infulae or Fanons) are lappets three inches wide and twelve to fourteen inches long, which are hung from the lower edge of the Vagas about six inches away from the centre on either side. They are made of the same material and colour as the Vagas. Usually three tassels are attached to the lower end and it is worn with the Khouyr (Mitre).

Khouyr (Mitre) is worn as part of the vestment of the Divine Liturgy. It has two stiff flexible oblong pieces, each having the shape of a pointed arch at the upper end, are sewn together at the lower half of the sides, which when pressed, open at the base and placed on the head. It symbolises the "helmet of salvation".

Madani (Ring) is a ring with a large precious stone, often amethyst, sometimes surrounded by small diamonds, worn by bishops, an insignia of their Episcopal administrative authority and granted to them at their consecration. Bishops used to seal documents with their rings.

Banageh (Enkolpion) is an oval medallion with the figure of the Holy Virgin and the Child Jesus represented on it and surrounded by a frame studded with precious stones and suspended with a chain from the neck on the chest. It is an Episcopal decoration granted by the Patriarch-Catholicos to all bishops after their consecration.

Kavazan Hovagan (Pastoral Staff or Pedum) is a rod, often of metal, sometimes of wood, about five feet six inches long, crooked at the top end and sometimes with a knob at the base of the crooked part. It is ornamented in various ways. It is a symbol of Episcopal authority over the flock. It is used during the Liturgy and other solemn services.

Kavazan Vartabedagan (Doctoral Staff or Crocia) is a rod, often of metal, sometimes of wood, having the same length as the pastoral staff, and in the form of tau cross, like the letter T. Very often the arms of the cross thus formed are so made as to represent two serpents facing each other. Sometimes there is a globe, with a small cross on it, on top of the rod where the two serpents branch off. The rod is used by priests or prelates having the doctor's rank. It may also be used by bishops. It is a symbol of teaching authority, the serpents representing wisdom, directed toward the world.

Asa (Staff or Ferula) is a rod of wood shorter than the other staffs, with a metal knob on top. It is carried by bishops as a walking stick and is not used during the Liturgy or the services.

Other Vestments

Shabig (Tunic) is long extending down to the ankle which is worn by clerks and deacons in the church during all services except Lent and other penitential days. It can be of any colour and symbolises purity of mind and of heart with which all who serve the Lord must be clothed.

Oorar (Stole) is a band of about nine feet long and four inches wide. It must be of rich material of the colours, with a cross sewn on where it rests on the shoulder and two other crosses, one in front and one at the back. It is worn on the left shoulder and hangs down loosely in front and at the back. It is the distinctive vestment of ordained deacons, but permission to wear it is often given by the bishop to persons in minor orders, together with the permission to perform some of the duties of a deacon.

Verargoo (Schema or Cassock) is a long vestment of plain black material with wide sleeves, without a waistline, coming down to the ankles. Verargoo is the clerical garb worn by all ranks of the clergy and at all times.

Pilon (Phelonian) is a vestment of the same shape as the cope, made of plain black material. It is worn by priests while attending any service. Some priests (married or unmarried) and all bishops wear the same in silk, black on fast days and purple on other days. This vestment symbolises the spiritual defence of the soul against the attacks of the evil One.

Veghar (Cowl) is a black silken headgear worn by the celibate clergy in the church. Married clergy stand bare-headed in the church during services. Veghar symbolises humility and the denial of the world.

Lanchakhach (Pectoral Cross) is a small metal cross studded with precious stones suspended from the neck on the chest. It is worn by priests as well as bishops. The right to wear the pectoral cross is granted by the Catholicos or the Patriarch, in recognition of long or distinguished service to the church.

Source: Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church – Tiran Abp Nersoyan

Church Vocabulary

PLACES IN THE CHURCH		
English	Armenian	Description
Sanctuary	Khoran	The main altar of the church is made up of the Holy Altar, Apse, Bema, Veil and Aumbries.
Holy Altar	Soorp Seghan	This is the table of sacrifice on which Holy Communion is prepared.
Apse	Kozak	The semi-circular space forming the Sanctuary.
Bema	Pem (Ambion)	The floor of the Apse.
Aumbry	Khorsh	Two Aumbries are situated in the right and left walls of the Apse respectively and house the chalice and other sacred objects.
Chancel	Tas	This is the space between the Sanctuary and Nave where the Bishop's Chair is placed. This area is restricted to clergy and church clerks.
Baptismal Font	Avazan	The font is a large wash basin where infant baptisms are performed and located in the Chancel.
Nave (Court)	Nav (Adyan)	This is the congregational area and is separated from the Chancel by a low rail on two sides leaving an unobstructed centre.
Vestry	Baharan	A room or chapel where the vestments of the celebrant and altar servers are prepared.

CLERGY & CHURCH SERVANTS		
Catholicos	Gatoghigos	The highest rank in the hierarchy of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The Catholicos of All Armenians is the world-wide spiritual leader who represents the centralised authority of the Armenian Church.
Patriarch	Badryark	The head of the Patriarchate which is a hierarchical See subject to the Catholicosate of All Armenians but with local autonomy. The Armenian Church has two Patriarchates in Jerusalem and Constantinople.
Primate	Arachnort	The head of a Diocese which represents a region in the world where Armenian churches and faithful are located.
Archbishop	Arkyebisgobos	An elevated rank of Bishop with a higher degree of precedence.
Bishop	Yebisgobos	A consecrated position bestowed upon an Archimandrite who is entrusted with a position of authority.
Archimandrite	Vartabed	A title bestowed upon priests (who have taken a vow of celibacy) that recognises scholarly achievement and church service.
Archpriest	Avak Kahana	A title bestowed on a married priest as a sign of distinguished service to the church.
Monk or Priest	Apegha	An ordained priest who has taken a vow of celibacy.
Priest	Kahana	An ordained priest who is married.
Celebrant	Badarakich	The priest/bishop who presides over the Divine Liturgy .
Deacon	Sargavak	The last of the minor orders with the role of serving in church services and assisting clergy. Deacons are ordained by bishops.
Sub Deacon	Gisasargavak	A minor order of rank before a Deacon.
Stole Bearer	Ooraragir	A minor order of rank before a Sub Deacon.
Acolyte	Tbir	The first of the minor orders granted to young men who participate in the morning service and Divine Liturgy. Acolytes are ordained by bishops.
Church Choir	Tbrats Tas	Servants of the church who partake in singing of hymns and chants during the Divine Liturgy.

Feasts & Saints

The Armenian Church commemorates events and individuals significant in our spiritual lives with days dedicated to Feasts. The purpose of these celebrations is to awaken our spirituality by remembering and reflecting on the significance of the events and rededicating ourselves toward spiritual strengthening.

The Armenian Church celebrates three types of feasts.

- **Dominical Feasts** which are connected to Christ’s mission of redemption as well as feasts dedicated to the Holy Mother of God, the Holy Cross and Holy Church.
- **Saints’ Days** which recognise the martyrs and holy fathers of the early church who lived exemplary lives of Christian virtue and sanctity.
- **Days of Abstinence** are intended as a time for repentance, meditation, reflection and prayer.

Source: Saints & Feasts of the Armenian Church – Patriarch Torkom Koushagian

Major Feast Days of the Armenian Apostolic Church (Dominical Feasts)

There are five major feast days of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the liturgical calendar. Of these significant days, only Christmas has a fixed date, the other days are changeable.

Holy Nativity [Christmas] and Theophany of Our Lord	6 January
Feast of the Glorious Resurrection of Our Lord [Easter]	March/April
Transfiguration of Our Lord Jesus Christ [Vartavar]	14th Sunday after Easter
Assumption of the Holy Mother of God [Soorp Asdvadzadzin]	Sunday nearest to 15 August
Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross [Khachverats]	September

Holy Nativity [Christmas] and Theophany of Our Lord Jesus Christ (Soorp Dzenoont yev Asdvadzahaydnootyoon)

The Holy Nativity is the blessed birth of our Lord Jesus Christ which took place in a humble manger in Bethlehem. [Gospel reading Luke 2:1-20]



The Theophany of our Lord Jesus Christ is the revelation of God when John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the River Jordan. [Gospel reading Mark 3:13-17]

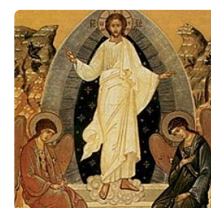
The Holy Nativity and Theophany are celebrated together on January 6. The reason for this double celebration is that at Christ's baptism, He was revealed as God and Saviour. The voice of the Father and appearance of the Holy Spirit in dove-form was likewise a revelation of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and the one Godhead.

Until about the second half of the 2nd century, in both the East and the West, the Baptism of Christ was held in pre-eminence above all celebrations even over the that of the Birth of Our Lord. It was in the same period that a need arose in the West to separate the Feast of the Birth from Theophany by celebrating the former on December 25. This was also designed to discourage Christians from partaking in a major pagan festival on that day. This custom eventually became accepted in the East as well – particularly in Jerusalem where it was difficult to celebrate Christ's birth in Bethlehem and His baptism at the River Jordan on the same day. Therefore by the end of the 4th century, all churches were celebrating Christ's birth on December 25, with the exception of the Armenian Church which did not feel the need to deviate from the ancient canon.

Source: Saints & Feasts of the Armenian Church – Patriarch Torkom Koushagian

Feast of the Glorious Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ [Easter] (Soorp Zadig)

Easter Sunday marks the resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ when the disciples found the empty tomb as Jesus conquered death. [Gospel reading John 20:1-18]



The feast day is preceded by commemoration services during Holy Week following Palm Sunday when Christ triumphantly entered Jerusalem as the Messiah. [Gospel reading John 12:12-19]

The first three days of Holy Week are not dedicated to any particular observance. Holy Thursday, known as Maundy Thursday is the celebration of the Passover sacrifice and the Last Supper which established the sacrament of Holy Communion.

The ceremony of the ritual of the “Washing of the Feet” also takes place on Holy Thursday which showed Jesus humility and servant attitude as example for his followers. [Gospel reading John 13:1-30]

On Holy Friday, a morning service is performed to remember the betrayal and Crucifixion of Christ followed in the afternoon by the Burial service which recalls Christ’s body taken down from the cross and placed in the tomb. [Gospel reading John 18-19]

Holy Saturday is Easter Eve (Jurakalooytz) and it is customary to celebrate the eve of feast days by lighting candles in the church (Candlemass). The Divine Liturgy is celebrated in the Armenian Church on Easter Eve as well as on Christmas Eve.

Transfiguration of Our Lord Jesus Christ (Don Aylagerbootyan Dyarn Mero Hisoosi Christosi)

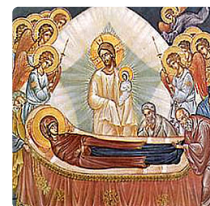
This feast is also referred to as Baydzaragerbootyoun because of Christ’s luminous appearance. In Armenia it is also known as Vartavar – Festival of Roses – after the old pagan feast, which it replaced.

The feast marks Christ’s brilliant appearance to three of His disciples, Peter, John, and James, on the holy mountain of Galilee, also known as Mount Tabor. [Gospel reading Matthew 17:1-13]



Assumption of the Holy Mother of God (Verapokhmoomn Srpo Asdvadzadzni)

Tradition states that after the Ascension of Jesus, Mary Mother-of-God was cared for by the Apostle John and lived in Jerusalem a further 15 years. When she passed away all the apostles except Bartholomew, who was away at the time, conducted her funeral at a cave-like tomb in the Garden of Gethsemane. When Bartholomew returned he wished to see Mary one last time and convinced the Apostles to open the tomb.

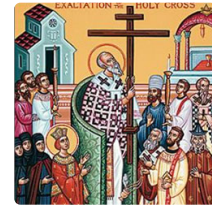


Upon opening the tomb, Mary's body could not be found and angels' voices were heard for three days and nights. They interpreted this as a sign that our Lord had assumed (taken up) His Mother into heaven as He had promised her. They found the empty tomb a confirmation of that promise for she had not been dead but had fallen asleep.

Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (Don Veratsman Srpo Kachi)

The Holy Cross is recognised as the symbol of salvation for all Christians from as early as the time of the Apostles.

The Exaltation, known as Khachverats in Armenian, is connected with several historical events, each of which involves the "raising up" or glorification of the cross. An early tradition identifies St James, the brother of the Lord and the first bishop of Jerusalem as the first to exalt a cross. Taking in hand a likeness (or perhaps an actual piece) of the original cross of the Crucifixion, St James elevated it before the people, and venerated it as a symbol of the power of God.



Saints' Days

The term "saint" was reserved for those who lived a virtuous life, those renowned for their faith and service to the church, those who were martyred for the faith, and those worthy of heavenly favour.

There are two categories of saints in the Armenian Church: those who are "celebrated" and those who are "commemorated". The former are celebrated by means of recollection during the Divine Liturgy and the latter by the daily reading of their biographies and/or martyrdom from the Haysmavoork (The Book of Martyrologies and Lives of the Saints). There are also saints who remain unknown for that reason the church celebrates "All Saints Day".

Source: Saints & Feasts of the Armenian Church – Patriarch Torkom Koushagian

Customs & Traditions of the Armenian Apostolic Church

How to Address the Clergy

Greeting a Celibate Priest
(Catholicos/Bishop/Vartabed)

“Asdvadz Oknagan, Vehapar Der (or) Srbazan Hayr
(or) Hayr Soorp” (God be your Helper)

The Priest’s reply will be “Asdvadz Bahaban” (God
Be Your Protector)

This is followed by kissing the Catholicos’ or
Bishop’s official seal of office as worn in the form of
a ring on the left hand. This signifies your
acknowledgement of the high office held.

Greeting a Married Priest

“Ornya Der” (Bless me Father)

The Priest’s reply will be “Asdvadz orhneh kez”
(May God bless you)

Attendance at the Church Service

The Divine Liturgy or Holy Mass (Soorp Badarak),
which is the main service in our Church on
Sundays, starts at 10:30am and at 10:00am on
Major Feast Days (Tabernacle Days)

It is the principal worship service of the Armenian
Apostolic Church and the most important
expression of the Church’s (the community of
believers’) faith and identity.

It is the duty of every true Christian to attend
Church on a regular basis, particularly on Holy
Feast Days.

Some Basic Principles of Attending Church

Having an attitude of reverence and respect

Concentrating on the service with worship as our
focus

Always keep in mind you are not a spectator, but a participant in the church services. Follow the Divine Liturgy with the liturgy books in the pews.

Use the screens in Church to participate in the service. The books in the pews also provide translations which allows you to follow the Badarak and understand what is happening

If you are familiar with the tunes of the hymns sung by the choir, softly join the singing. Do not sing however with the officiating Priest and the Deacon at the Altar

When offering baskets are being passed, know that your offering is for God and His Church

Dress Etiquette for Church

Proper and modest dress consists of:

Ladies – sleeved and non-revealing dress or blouse, respectable fitted clothes and skirt length with head covering

Gentlemen – sleeved and collared shirt, long trousers, coat and tie is preferred with no head covering

General Manners in Church

Turning off mobile phones before entering

Not talking during the Church service

Not chewing gum or bringing food or drinks into the Church

Not crossing legs while seated. Feet should be on the floor, ready to stand at attention (which is what “Let us attend/ broskhoomeh” means)

Not stretching arms on pews or placing hands in pockets or behind your back

Not turning heads to look for friends and other similar distractive motions

Arriving on time, otherwise entering discreetly

It is preferable for early comers to take the first pews and leave the back ones for the late comers to ensure the least distraction

It is improper to leave before the conclusion of Holy Mass

Cross Yourself

When you are entering Church

When the Holy Trinity is mentioned

When one Person of the Holy Trinity is mentioned

When the celebrant makes the sign of the cross on the faithful

When the celebrant or the deacon censers the faithful

When the deacon intones “Asdoodzo yergirbakestsook”

Whenever the faithful feel like crossing themselves

When you are exiting the Church

Lighting Candles

One of the devotional practices of the Armenian Church is the beautiful custom of burning candles in front of the holy pictures. While making the sign of the cross, you say a short prayer for you and your dear ones, then take your place. There is no need to burn excessive numbers of candles for each family member. Lighting one candle has the same significance as lighting ten. Donations for candles are an expression of appreciation for God’s blessings and grace.

Taking Your Place on Entering the Church

When you take your place in the pews you should bow down your head slightly, make the sign of the cross and inaudibly say The Lords Prayer. You are now ready to partake in the service.

Times to wait before entering to sit on a pew are when:

The Gospel is being read on the bema (khoran)

The Nicene Creed (Havadamk) is in progress

The Choir is singing the “Sanctus” (Soorp, Soorp),
“One is Holy, One is Lord” (Miayn Soorp, Miayn

Der) or “Lord Have Mercy” (Der Voghormia)

The Priest is saying the word of institution, “Take, eat; this is My Body” (Arek, gerek, ays eh marmin eem)

The sermon is being given

Standing, Sitting, Kneeling and Bowing Down

It is traditional to stand during the whole service if you wish.

If not, follow the clergy or markings in the Liturgy books to know when it is appropriate to stand, sit or kneel.

During the Divine Liturgy the direction to “bow down” is always given by the Deacon with the words, “Asdoodzo yergirbakeestsook” (Let us bow down to God). Bow your head or waist and cross yourself.

Salutation or Kiss of Peace

St Paul routinely directed the members of the Christian church to “greet one another with a holy kiss” as a visible sign of unity and common vision of love in Jesus Christ. A ritualised greeting of peace and reconciliation is found in the Eucharist of all ancient churches and is known as the “Salutation” or “Kiss of Peace”.

To receive the salutation from the priest giving the ‘Greeting’, you simply kiss his hand. If a layman is giving it to you, he will incline his head first to your right and then to your left with his right hand on his heart giving the proper salutation below. You respond accordingly. Then in turn, you repeat the same head action to the person next to you with right hand on your heart passing on the greeting as it was done to you. The salutation passes on throughout the church in this manner until everybody in the church receives it.

While giving the salutation you say “Krisdos ee mech mer haydnetzav” (Christ is revealed amongst us).

The receiver answers “Orhnyal eh haynootyoonun Krisdosi” (Blessed is the revelation of Christ).

By this symbolic act the whole congregation is bound first by its own mystical Head, Christ, and then with one another in one sacred bond of love. Not to take or give the salutation is bad manners in the church.

Taking Holy Communion

Holy Communion is a sacrament by which the believer receives Christ’s Body and Blood in the form of bread and wine for remission of sins and the reception of eternal life. It is offered to the faithful during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

Any baptised member of the Armenian Church can receive Holy Communion.

It is up to the individual to decide how often he/she is ready and willing to take Holy Communion.

Those who wish to receive Holy Communion normally prepare themselves by prayer and by fasting from all food and drink on the morning before receiving the sacrament. This is the ideal toward which all should strive. However, if a person has not been able to fast for health reasons, but earnestly desires to receive Holy Communion, he/she should not hesitate to approach the chalice and to receive the sacrament

Spend time before church and during the confession recitation to prayerfully reflect on how you have fallen short in the ways enumerated. Commit yourself to working actively to “sin no more.”

Before Holy Communion is distributed, communicants are called forward before the priest and making the sign of the cross they kneel/stand before him for general confession and absolution. As a prepared examination of conscience is read, communicants respond with “Megha Asdoodzo” (I have sinned against God). Then the priest, not by

his authority but by the “very word” of Jesus Christ, absolves the sins of all who made the confession.

When taking Holy Communion:

Communicants should make their way before the Altar with contemplative reverence

Ladies should ensure their heads are covered and any lip colour removed

Make the sign of the cross

Sharing in the Holy Bread (Mas)

Nearing the end of the Divine Liturgy the holy bread or “Mas” is distributed among the congregation. “Mas” means share or portion.

When you take a piece of “Mas” you kiss it and eat it making the sign of the cross. It is custom to take a small portion of “Mas” home to those members of the family who were desirous to come to church but were unable to do so.

Taking “Mas” does not mean taking Holy Communion. It is sharing in a fellowship meal and is a sign of Christian charity and spiritual kinship.

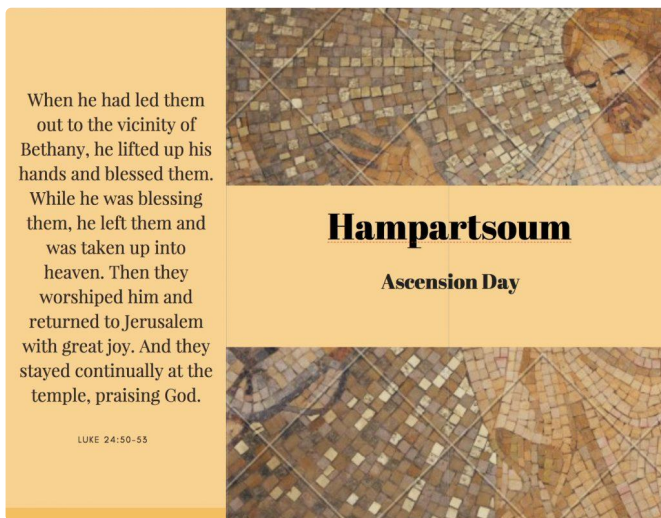
When we participate in the Divine Liturgy and take Holy Communion we are united with Christ by receiving His Body and Blood. Therefore the “mas” offered to the congregation is intended for those who but did not partake in the holy sacrament.

Exiting the Church

Your departure from church should be as reverent and as orderly as your entrance. Before exiting the Church turn toward the Altar, make the sign of the cross and depart from God’s house.

In the Armenian Church when the service concludes, the officiating clergy holds the Gospel for congregation members to approach and receive his personal blessings before leaving the church.

Ascension of our Lord – Hampartsoum



The **Feast of Holy Ascension** marks the ascent of our Lord Jesus Christ into heaven on the 40th day following His glorious Resurrection. The timing is clearly specified in the Acts of the Apostles, where it is stated that Christ presented himself alive to the Apostles, “appearing to them during forty days and speaking of the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

On the 40th day, after he finished speaking to the Apostles, “as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.” (Acts 1:9). The Gospel according to Mark sums up the same story as follows: “So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God” (Mark 16: 19). The same account is also in the Gospel according to Luke: “While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven” (Luke 24:51). There are also several references to this event in some of the other books of the New Testament.

The Feast of the Ascension is an important Dominical feast (one relating to the life of Jesus Christ) that has been celebrated in the universal church since ancient times. Modern scholarship traces its earliest observance to the 4th century.

It is always celebrated on the 40th day after Easter and falls on a Thursday; however, in the Armenian

Church, the observance of the feast begins on Wednesday evening during vespers.

From ancient tradition, we know that the Ascension of the Lord took place on the Mount of Olives. To this day the Armenian Brotherhood of St. James in Jerusalem holds vesper service and a vigil on the eve of the Feast of the Ascension at the sanctuary on the Mount of Olives.

Besides being a Dominical feast, the Ascension also marks the anniversary of the reestablishment of the Holy See at the monastery of Holy Etchmiadzin in 1441, after a separation of almost 1,000 years.

As with other feasts, Ascension and the Resurrection of the Lord are celebrated over the following nine days until Pentecost.

Discovery of the Relics of St Gregory the Illuminator



The discovery of the relics of St Gregory the Illuminator is one of the three significant feast days dedicated to the memory of the Patron Saint of Armenia and the impact of the holy father on the foundation of that which has become our National Church.

According to Holy Tradition, following Armenia's conversion to Christianity, in his final years, St Gregory led an ascetic life in the cave of Mane on the Mountain named Sepuh where he died. Shepherds, finding his body, buried him not recognising the Armenian Pontiff. One of his students, Garnik from Basen sees a vision, where Gregory identifies the location of his relics. The relics were thereupon transferred to the village of Tordan, in the province of Daranagh, and buried there.

The relics of St Gregory the Illuminator are one of our most revered within the Armenian Church, as well as all Christian Churches.

Below, church scholar and historian Fr. Krikor Maksoudian of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America retells the story of the Illuminator's final days, and details of what came after.

St. Gregory in Solitude

As St. Gregory grew old and became more involved in solitary life, King Drtad asked him to ordain his younger son Arisdagés a bishop, and to take him on as Gregory's assistant. Gregory had already retired by A.D. 325, when the Holy Council of Nicaea took place, and he sent his son Arisdagés in his place to participate in this first ecumenical gathering of bishops of the Christian Church. In his retired state, however, Gregory continued his pastoral work by preaching and writing homilies, employing a simple language so that people could understand.

St. Gregory's favorite spot as a solitary was a site called "the Caves of Mané," located on Mount Sebuhan near Erzinjan, now in eastern Turkey. This place had previously been the residence of the Virgin Mané, one of St. Hripsimé's companions. It is unclear how long St. Gregory lived there, and when exactly he died. After some time had elapsed, shepherds chanced upon his body and buried him at the spot where they found him, not knowing who he was. During the fifth century, a hermit named Karnig was guided by a vision to the grave of the saint and discovered his relics.

It was customary in those days to distribute relics of saints to various churches in different parts, and it seems that the same practice was implemented in St. Gregory's case. Karnig took the body of the saint to the village of Tortan, located to the east of Mount Sebuhan, and buried some of the relics there; the rest were taken elsewhere. On or near St. Gregory's unmarked grave there stood a church, built at a later time and still extant in 1915. The exact site of St. Gregory's grave in Tortan was not known even to visitors in the tenth century; but nine other graves existed inside the church, and were said to belong to King Drtad, his queen Ashkhen, his sister Khosrovitukhd, and other members of St. Gregory's family. These were still extant as late as 1915.

Holy Relics

The remaining relics of St. Gregory were later taken to the Monastery of St. John the Baptist in

Pakavan, where St. Gregory had baptized King Drtad and the Armenian people in the Aradzani River. The relics were kept in a box and taken out on important occasions. In A.D. 450, when a rumor arose in Armenia that St. Vartan and the Armenian magnates had accepted the Persian religion during their visit to Persia's royal court, the returning magnates were met by a gathering of priests, noblemen and common people, who held forth the box of St. Gregory's relics as a reminder of their Christian roots. Similar incidents occurred at times of turmoil and joy.

The relics of St. Gregory were later taken and laid beneath the massive columns of the Holy Zvartnots Church, whose ruins are still visible near the airport of Yerevan. The saint's skull was kept separately in a box. At some point the skull was transferred to the West and is now kept in the church of St. Gregory the Armenian in Naples, Italy. (Some other relics of St. Gregory deposited in that location were recently transferred to the Armenian Church by the Roman Catholic Church, as a tribute to the 1700th anniversary of Armenia's conversion to Christianity.)

Today, relics of St. Gregory may be found at Holy Etchmiadzin, Holy Jerusalem and Antilias. The relic at Holy Etchmiadzin, encased in an arm-shaped reliquary, is used to bless the Holy Chrism (Muron) once every seven years. It is on display in the treasury of the Holy See.

In the calendar of the Armenian Church, the discovery of the relics of St. Gregory is an important feast and is commemorated on the Saturday before the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost.

King Drtad, Queen Ashkhén and Princess Khosrovitukhd are regarded as saints of the Armenian Church because of their role in the conversion and spread of Christianity in Armenia. It is obvious that St. Gregory could not have succeeded in his mission without help from the royal family. It is also important to note that from the very beginning, there was lay participation in

the founding and administration of the Armenian Church.

While St. Gregory serves as an example of a fatherly figure for all Armenians, King Drtad, Queen Ashkhén and Princess Khosrovitukhd stand out as the forerunners of lay benefactors. The church cannot function only with priests and bishops. Without lay participation very little is achieved. No matter what our station in life, we must make ourselves humble before God and do our share to achieve Christ's mission.

By the Very Rev. Fr. Krikor Maskoudian, adapted from his book "The Holy Feasts of Saint Gregory the Illuminator: Celebrating the Life & Lineage of Armenia's Patron Saint" (2003).

In the Shadow of the Cross: The Holy Cross and Armenian History

Every autumn (spring in Australia), the Armenian Church celebrates the Exaltation of the Holy Cross—one of the five major feasts of the Church, and the most important of the four feasts of the Holy Cross. The Exaltation refers to the True Cross on which Christ was crucified, which according to Church tradition was ceremoniously elevated for veneration on three occasions. It was first elevated by St. James the Apostle, the first Bishop of Jerusalem, who lifted the cross with the words “We bow before thy cross, O Christ”—a formulation still used in the Armenian liturgy.

The second occasion involved the discovery of the True Cross after a period of some 300 years. In A.D. 326, Queen Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, traveled to Jerusalem to identify the holy places associated with Christ’s life. She authenticated the True Cross by placing upon it the body of a recently deceased youth, who was miraculously raised to life when he came in contact with the formerly discarded cross. According to tradition, the True Cross was overgrown with aromatic basil, which is used in the commemoration of the feast day today.

The third occasion came in the 7th century when the Persians had seized the True Cross of Jesus after conquering the city of Jerusalem. Leading a coalition of forces, including Armenians, the Emperor Heraclius recaptured the cross and, en route to Jerusalem, passed with it through Armenia, where the cross was repeatedly raised up and venerated.

On the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the Divine Liturgy is marked with an antasdan service (blessing of the fields) during which the processional cross is adorned with basil (a symbol of royalty) and the four corners of the church are blessed as a symbol for all the world.

The cross is a source of great national pride for us as a khachagir—or “cross-bearing”—nation. For over the centuries, Armenians have borne Christ’s cross with faith, hope, and love. What was once an instrument of torture and death—comparable to the modern electric chair—became for us

Christians the symbol of salvation, and victory over death.

Naturally, to those with no faith, our veneration for the cross makes no sense at all. They cannot understand how so basic an instrument could be at the center of our worship, of our churches and altars. But we see in the cross the instrument on which our Lord sacrificed Himself in order to cleanse mankind of its sins. The cross for us is the instrument of life: a divine sign that shows the power of life over death. It is for this reason that Christians throughout the world venerate the Holy Cross.

Throughout our history, we Armenians have lived in the shadow of the cross. Armenians were (and still are) geographically situated on the “leading edge” of the Christian world. Having suffered for our faith in Christ, we have also shared in the passion of His Crucifixion. No wonder, then, that the cross would become pre-eminent among our national emblems, appearing on the domes and walls of our churches, on our altars, in our homes—even erupting out of the Armenian landscape, as stone khachkars.

Imagine the impact this sign must have had on the minds of our ancestors in the Middle Ages! Everywhere they turned, the sign of the cross confronted their eyes—in overt but also rather subtle ways.

Our churches have cruciform plans, and our priests bless their congregations with crosses. We put chaplets with crosses on the heads of those making the marriage vow. Babies—both boys and girls—are given crosses at the time of baptism. We also give those children names like “Khachig” and “Khachadoor” (in medieval times, our ancestors used feminine forms of these as well). We even trace the lines of the invisible cross etched into the very architecture of the human body when we make the Sign of the Cross.

Why did our ancestors surround themselves with crosses? Perhaps because they understood that human nature being what it is, all of us are prone to making the wrong choices. So, in anticipation of their own moments of fateful decision, they dotted the landscape with crosses, to unavoidably remind themselves of “the power of God.” To view the cross as a sign of God’s power is not simply to recall that He is watching us, knows the secrets of our hearts, and will judge us accordingly (although this, of course, is true). But more significantly, the cross is our evidence that

God has used —and will use—His power to help us in our times of trial: that through His son, He has stretched forth His hand to mankind as a whole, and to every human individual, to redeem us, guide us, support us—and make us worthy of His kingdom, in spite of our mortal tendency to defy Him.

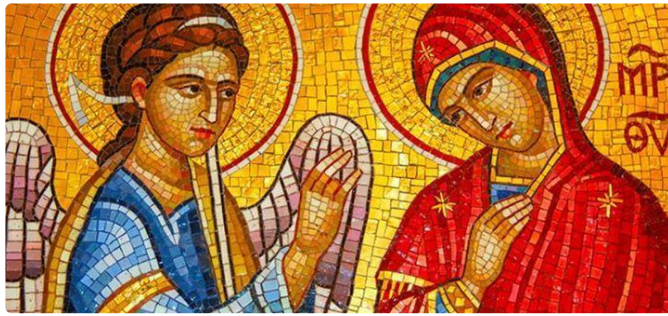
The Armenians of old took this power very seriously. One of their favorite sayings was: Sourp Khachn yeghitsi eents oknagan—"Let the Holy Cross be my support." We today could benefit from their wisdom, by keeping our own thoughts focused on the mystery of the Holy Cross.

Such veneration should not be confused with idolatry. We worship the idea or the mystery behind the Holy Cross. Our expectation and hope from the sign of the cross is a reflection of our faith in the Resurrection of Christ. The presence of that sign at every stage and every turn in our lives reminds us that His blood was shed over the original cross, to free us as individuals from our sins. As frequently as we confront a cross, we must be aware of the sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf. More to the point, we must consider why that sacrifice was necessary—and what is required from us in response.

During times of adversity and upheaval, the Holy Cross has been the most powerful support for the Armenian flock of Christ. And in times of peace, too, the sign of the Holy Cross has been —and is—our most abundant source of consolation. The cross casts its shadow over our lives—but it also sheds light, healing old wounds, and illuminating before us the way to God's kingdom. It guides us along a path of righteousness, whose ultimate destination is the victory over the ills of the world.

—Very Rev. Fr. Krikor Maksoudian and Christopher H. Zakian of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (www.armenianchurch.us)

The Annunciation to Mary



On April 7, the Armenian Church celebrates one of her greatest feasts – the Annunciation to St Mary. In the Gospel of Luke we learn that the Angel Gabriel brings the good news to the Virgin about the birth of the Saviour (Lk 1:26-38).

According to Holy Tradition and the Evangelist, the Angel Gabriel appears to St. Mary while reading a passage from the prophecy of Isaiah, in which it is written about the birth of the Emmanuel from a Virgin. The Angel greets Mary, telling her, “Fear not, Mary: for you have found favour with God. And behold, you shall conceive in your womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call His Name JESUS.”

The Angel Gabriel further explains to Mary, “The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the Power of the Highest shall overshadow you, therefore also that which is Holy which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God.” St Mary could foresee the torments and sufferings that she would endure. However, by giving mankind an excellent example of obedience to the Divine Will, she said, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it happen to me as you have said.” Beginning from the moment when the Holy Virgin expressed these words, she was with child.

This Gospel story is one expression of why the Armenian Church accords high honour to motherhood, and appreciates the role of women in family life, and the lives of mankind.

Upon the Pontifical order of His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, the Feast of the Annunciation to the

Virgin Mary is proclaimed as a day of “Blessing of Motherhood and Beauty”. On that day, a special blessing service is conducted in the Armenian Churches.