

The Sacraments

The word sacrament comes from the Latin *sacrare*, which means “to dedicate.” Thus a sacrament is a rite which not only signifies some specific grace but which produces that grace in the soul of the person to whom it is administered.

What is grace? It is that which makes us fulfill our mission as children of God. It is not a state of being. 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.” This implies that the fruits of the sacraments (such as being born to a spiritual life in baptism) are received mysteriously. Each sacrament has an inward and outward expression. For example, the outward expression in baptism is the water. This symbolizes the rebirth and cleansing of the soul of the child, which is inward. Although everything which is in and of the Church is sacramental, there are seven formal sacraments of the Armenian Church which correspond to the different states and situations of a person’s life.

Baptism

Birth is necessary to begin a life; baptism is necessary so that the child can start a “new life” as a child of God. This is not a conscious act of faith. God has already chosen us and entered our lives (Galatians 4:6). But it is through baptism that a new Christian is brought into the life of the Church and the hope of salvation. Thus it is an act of the people of God and not a single individual. The Armenian understanding of baptism draws upon the evidence of Scripture and Tradition to baptize infants—who are pledged to a life in Christ by godparents and the community—as well as adults. Individuals who have not been baptized are always warmly invited to do so by the church.

Baptism, chrismation, and Holy Communion are all given at the time of baptism. Together these make the new believer ready to fully participate in the life of the Church.

Chrismation

In the process of growing up, the child needs the strength of body and mind. Chrismation, or the anointing with oil at baptism, seals him or her with the Holy Spirit, promising spiritual strength as a member of the Church.

Penance

In confessing sins and seeking forgiveness, the faithful are made whole again as citizens of God’s kingdom.

Holy Communion

We all need nourishment to live. The soul needs spiritual food to keep alive and to grow in the Kingdom of God. Holy Communion is the most important sacrament and the center of the Church’s life; this union with the Lord is indeed the ultimate purpose of a Christian life as a whole. Communion (*haghortootiun* in

Armenian) refers to the mystical union of people with God and each other as they gather, pray, read the Bible, remember Christ, and share in his redemption of the world through the bread and wine that become truly his body and blood. The faithful are encouraged to take Communion as often as they can.

Marriage

Men and women join their lives together in love and for the glory of God.

Holy Orders

People dedicate their lives directly to God and commit to serving in his Church.

Anointing of the Sick

The sacrament heals the soul and body of the sick.