

Feasts and Fasts



The Paregentan Party

The Diocese was hosting a Poon Paregentan party and I was looking forward to going. I had been to a few Christmas parties and really enjoyed them. I'm so proud when I go to St. Vartan Cathedral, proud of the whole Armenian Church.

The bus trip into New York was fun. All the kids sang for a while. I was hungry because I was going to receive communion and I had not eaten breakfast. Now I was glad I didn't eat since the bumpy ride in the school bus would have made me sick!

The bus dropped us off on Second Avenue, and we all grouped together on the steps of the plaza. Our Sunday School teachers and the parent helpers reminded us about manners, and checked to be sure we all looked neat. We quietly entered the church and took our place in the pews. There were children from churches in New York, New Jersey, and even as far away as Philadelphia! I saw my cousin with her

school group and smiled at her. We would meet after church to say hello.

I said the Hayr Mer and sat down like the rest of the children from my school. Soon a priest came to the chancel. He made a few announcements and welcomed us. Badarak began and my friend and I shared a book and followed along. Everyone took communion which lasted a long time, but was very nice. The sermon was nice, too. The priest explained what the feast day was all about.

He said Poon Paregentan meant "the real day of good living," and that it represented the time when Adam and Eve were in Paradise and in God's presence. He told us that their life was really good then, and we try to have a really good day now to remember it. I guess all feast days help us remember good times we share with God and each other. He also said that Monday would start Great Lent and that we should not plan parties and special



amusements during that time. We should try not to eat more than we really need, try not to eat certain foods such as meat. We should pray more and think of others. Great Lent would prepare us for Easter, and Easter would remind us again what it will be like to be with God in his Kingdom.

I thought about how much I enjoyed my life now. I always have enough to eat and a nice place to live and good parents and friends. I wondered how life would be even better with God.

After church we all went down to the hall where we had a delicious lunch. Then we went to another room and saw a play which consisted of three Arme-

nian folktales. They were in English, but written by an Armenian. It was really terrific. Everyone laughed and laughed. We were all having a wonderful time. We got balloons and packets of prayer cards to take home. I was sorry the party was over.

When we got outside there were several school buses waiting to take each church group home. We found our bus and had a bumpy trip home. I couldn't wait to tell my parents about it, from the beginning of church to the end of the last play! It had really been a day of "good living" for me. When I went to bed that night I said a special prayer to thank God for Poon Paregentan!

WHAT IS A FEAST? WHAT IS A FAST?



In the Church, a feast is a special celebration. Like a regular feast, there is a special meal and people enjoy special events. The special meal for a Church feast is communion. The special events are songs and ceremonies just for the occasion.

Every Sunday is a feast day. We celebrate the resurrection of Jesus.

The Divine Liturgy is the special ceremony and the hymns are the special songs. The special meal is communion.

Many Sundays are feast days for other events. One that we celebrate every September is the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Special hymns are sung, and the ceremony of Antasdan is held. The cross is decorated with basil leaves. We are happy to remember the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross as a time when Christians got the cross of Jesus back from the Persians who had stolen it from Jerusalem.

Fast in the Church does not mean quick! It means a day (or days) of self-denial and discipline. It prepares us for

the feast. When we fast, we do not eat at all or we eat very little. We deny ourselves God's gift of food. We discipline ourselves, becoming stronger mentally and spiritually. It's like going into training for a sports event. To prepare for the event, we don't just exercise or practice, we make ourselves mentally stronger, too.

In Armenian the word "bahk" is used to mean both "fast" and "lent." Lent is a longer period of preparation which includes fasting. It is the custom to fast before all major feast days. The longest period of lent in the Church is Great Lent (Medz Bahk) which is before Easter.

To prepare ourselves for communion we do many things including fasting. Children your age should be able to go without breakfast for the morning before you receive communion. But if there are special reasons for you not to fast it is permissible to eat and still receive communion. But that does not excuse you from disciplining yourself mentally and spiritually in other ways.

The Church has regular fasting days each week. On Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the whole year except for the period of 40 days after Easter, we should fast.

After the fast, the feast meal seems better! You might say to yourself, "God really loves us to give us this food to eat. When I fasted before the meal, I realized how miserable I would be if God did not provide the food!"



FEASTS AND FASTS

"That's the third peanut butter sandwich you've had this week," Bill said to Mark.

"So what. I like peanut butter," said Mark. "Besides, I'm fasting this week."

"You're what?" asked Bill.

"I'm fasting. I'm not eating meat or animal products. My family fasts the week before each of our big church holy days." Mark went back to eating his peanut butter-on-pita sandwich.

"Why do you do that?" Bill asked.

"It's a tradition in our church. It is a way of preparing for our special holy days." Mark enjoyed telling Bill about the Armenian Church. He and Bill were good friends. He had gone to Bill's church a couple of times with the Scouts and Bill had come to the Armenian Church a few times when he had slept over Mark's house. Mark was glad he could tell Bill things about the Armenian Church.

"I bet you really like it when the fast is over! I don't think I could eat peanut butter for a whole week." Bill smiled at his friend Mark. He enjoyed visiting Mark's house and eating all the delicious Armenian food. Mark's father called Bill the Pilaf Kid.

"Yes. After the fast comes the feast! We always have a very special meal on

the holy day. Fasting before it helps us all appreciate the feast. All the food seems to taste better and we all realize God loves us so much.”

“Your mom’s food always tastes great. Invite me over Sunday,” Bill said jokingly.

“Why not. I’ll ask my mom and dad.”

“Great, but does that mean I’ll have to eat peanut butter for the next four days?”

Both boys laughed.

Questions to think about ...

1. Do you think Mark was looking forward to the feast day, the meal, or both? Explain.

2. How do you think fasting prepares you for the feast day?

3. What other kinds of preparation would help get ready for the feast day?

4. What other activities do you prepare for in special ways?

If you were planning a perfect Parengentan day, what would you include?

HOMEWORK:

Look at your plans for your Parengentan day. During the week find pictures in magazines that would help show your plans. Make a montage of your plans.

How to make a montage:

1. Collect desired pictures from magazines and newspapers.
2. Paste them onto a large piece of cardboard or heavy paper.
3. Overlap the pictures, fill in empty spaces with colored paper or tissue paper.
4. Use a thick marker pen to highlight important pictures in your montage.

After you finish your montage, write a short paragraph to explain it and glue it onto the bottom right corner. Be sure to also write your name on the card.