

## SUNDAY OF THE WORLD CHURCH: A Feast Unique to the Armenian Church (*April 14*)

Among the Sundays that follow Easter in the Armenian Church is a day curiously designated "Sunday of the World Church" or "Green Sunday" (*Ashkharhamadran/Ganach Giragi*). Ormanian glides over it, noting in his landmark reference work, *A Dictionary of the Armenian Church (Dsissagan Pararan)*, that it has no ecclesiastical origin or significance and perhaps evolved from a popular festival. The term "green," he conjectures, might simply invoke images of Spring and could even be a remnant of a pre-Christian or early Christian celebration of the season of new life.

The late Patriarch Shnork Kaloustian, in his study entitled, "The Multi-Colored Sundays (referring to the color names associated with some of them) and Pentecost" noted that the feast day seemed to be unique to the Armenian Church. While its precise origins remain unknown, Patriarch Shnork speculates that the hymns and prayers of the day echo celebrations in the early church that were held when chapels were built, especially those built on the sites where Jesus was born, rose, and ascended as well as at the Upper Room. In its reference to chapels of the world, the feast eventually came to glorify the universal Christian Church. As for the reference in the church calendar to "green," he attributes this also to Spring greenery and likewise, the following Sunday, dubbed "red" by the Church, to the blossoms that follow. In any event, all of the Sundays between Easter and Pentecost celebrate resurrection, new life and the promise of Christ's presence for all time. As the hymn (*sharagan*) of the day proclaims:

Today the angels celebrate with us,  
For the heavenly King comes into the Holy  
Church.

Be glad, rejoice, O Church, Bride of Christ,  
Since the Lord of all chose you and was pleased  
to dwell in you.

Illuminate yourself, O Mother Church,  
Since within you the Divine Light rose  
And enlightens your faithful . . .

The Armenian Church is joined by many other Christian denominations in focusing its lectionary on two particular books of Scripture during the season between Easter and Pentecost: *Acts* and the *Gospel*

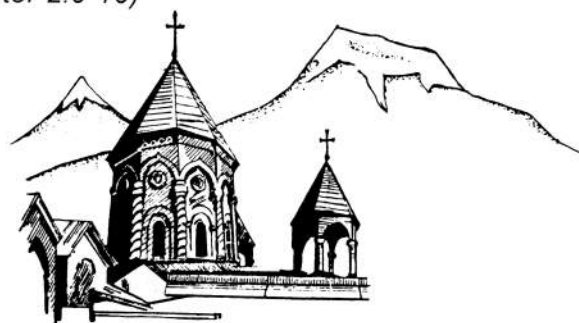
of *John*. In the *Gospel of John*, often referred to as a book of "signs" pointing to deeper theological truths, we read many stories of "newness" (*John* is considered the *Genesis* of the New Testament since it describes the world made new in Christ and was considered to be written especially for the newly-baptized). The *Book of Acts* chronicles something else new: the early Christian community as it grew through suffering, miracle, and conversion into its ordained vocation.

So what and whom do we encounter in the readings for this day?

- the Pharisee Nicodemus hears from Jesus that in order to see the Kingdom of God, he needs to be born "anew . . . of the water and the Spirit." (*John* 3:5)

- Saul, a one-time unrelenting persecutor of Christians who becomes the new man, Paul, preaches in the new churches of Damascus and Jerusalem. And "the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up." (*Acts* 9:31)

- a description of this new people of God as a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who were "once no people, but now you are God's people." (*1 Peter* 2:9-10)



For Christians, Easter is a better time for resolutions than January 1. With the trees budding, new life everywhere and the countryside in vivid rebirth, the Church takes us on its own walking tour from Easter to Pentecost—the day when the Church was born in tongues of fire and when Thaddeus and Bartholomew were consecrated for Armenia.

This was, and continues to be, the true new beginning and Green Sunday helps us remember that the world was born again and we along with it.

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