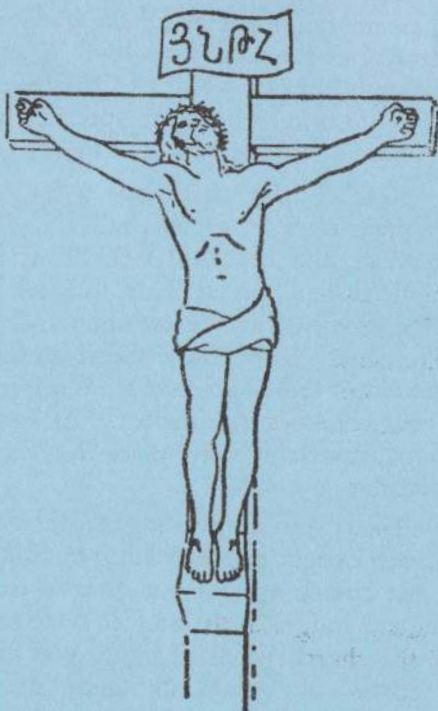


## HOLY WEEK

Although Holy Week is a very short period, it is the most eventful and important church period for all Christians. During this brief but very important and solemn period, the Church follows closely the last scenes of our Lord's life. On the last three days of the Holy Week, the Church even reproduces, in a kind of sacred drama, the last acts of the Passion of our Lord.

The Holy Week begins with *Palm Sunday*, which commemorates the last and solemn entry of our Lord into the city of Jerusalem, five days prior to His death. It was a triumphant occasion for Jesus and His disciples. The multitude came out of town to welcome Him, waving palms and olive branches - symbols of victory and peace - and with cries of "Hosanna," which is an exclamation of



praise reserved for Almighty God alone. Children also took part in this popular procession, singing psalms of victory. In memory of this event our churches are decorated with palms and olive branches on this Sunday.

There is a very impressive service in the evening of Palm Sunday, called "Opening of the Doors" (*Turnpatsek*), which is symbolic of our entrance into the Heavenly Jerusalem. This dramatic ceremony is, unfortunately, falling out of use in American Armenian Churches.

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of the Holy Week are comparatively quiet days.

*Great Thursday\** is indeed a great day for all of Christendom. It is the anniversary of the *institution of the Holy Communion*. On this day, at the Last Supper, our Lord instituted the life-giving Sacrament of the Holy Communion. Divine Liturgy is celebrated in commemoration of our Lord's Last Supper and the first Holy Communion. In the evening takes place the dramatic ceremony of the **WASHING OF FEET**, in memory of Our Lord's washing

of the feet of His disciples, giving a sublime lesson of humility. During the night of Great Thursday, an *all-night vigil* is kept, in memory of the last sleepless night of our Lord on earth. This nocturnal service is called in Armenian "KHAVAROOM," i.e., Darkness. During the service a time comes when all the lights of the church are put out, commemorating the awful darkness which fell upon the earth on the betrayal of the One Who said, "I am the Light of the World". On this night the last words of Christ are read, long and mournful church songs are sung, which aim specifically to portray the last sad hours of our Lord at Gethsemane and before the human law-courts.

*Good Friday\** is the most solemn and sad day for Christians. It commemorates the unspeakable SUFFERINGS, CRUCIFIXION, DEATH, and ENTOMBMENT of our Lord. Every good Christian should make a special effort to break the routine of his business at least for a time between 12:00 noon and 3:00 p.m. and go to some church to meditate about these heart-breaking events. Most unfortunately sometimes the commemorative service of Crucifixion is not practised in our churches in America. At any rate, the Burial or Entombment service invariably takes place in all our churches in the evening of this great day.

*Great Saturday*, being Easter Eve, the celebrations of a joyous character begin in the evening of this day. In the beginning the lights of the church are put out, then with reading of Isaiah Chapter sixty, they are suddenly put on. It is already the joyous Easter Eve. From the sudden and dramatic lighting of candles in the church, the ceremony of Easter Eve takes its name in Armenian, "Jrak-a-louyts," i.e., Lighting of Candles. The famous lesson from the Prophet Daniel is read (Ch. 3:1-90 Armenian or Catholic version), by a chorus leader, who is followed by three other readers who represent the three young men who were thrown in the fire but were not burned, symbolizing the entombment of Jesus who, although buried, "did not see corruption". With the Evening Divine Liturgy the Saturday church celebrations come to a conclusion.

*Easter* is the most solemn feast of the Church. It commemorates the glorious Resurrection of our Lord. The joyous character of Easter is shown by the drastic change in the atmosphere and tone of the worship in the church. The long and heavy services of Lent and Holy Week give way to more gay and triumphant hymns in which the words, "Christos Hariav e merelots," Christ is risen from the dead, are constantly repeated.

\* For all the days of the Holy Week, invariably, the adjective "great" (Avak) is used in the Armenian Church. There is no equivalent for the adjectives "Maundy" (used for Thursday) and "Good" (used for Friday) in the Eastern Churches. However, the expression "Good Friday" is kept here, because it is in so common usage in English speaking circles.

Easter Sunday is followed by a period of forty days, during which time there are no saints or fasting days. The period is entirely dedicated to the glorification of the Resurrection of our Lord, and, in commemoration of the forty days which Christ spent on earth after His Resurrection. The last day is the ASCENSION DAY, commemorating our Lord's entry into Heaven. Then comes PENTECOST, which is the fiftieth day after Easter, and commemorates the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, and the Birth of the Christian Church.

## EASTER

With the blossoming of trees and flowers, with the songs of the birds, which are signs that a new cycle of life is beginning in nature, Easter comes to refresh in our minds the memory of the greatest regeneration in history — the glorious Resurrection of our Lord. It is most wonderful that this happy news of new life came from a tomb in a graveyard. Christ's crucifixion, death and burial in a sepulchre were witnessed by a great multitude. But on the third day after His Burial His tomb was found empty.

No one has summarized the facts about the Resurrection better than St. Paul. In his First Epistle to the Corinthians, in the 15th chapter, he writes (Verses 1:8 inclusive):



"Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the Gospel, which you receive, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me."

This is the earliest written record of Christ's Resurrection, having been written about twenty years after the event took place. Thus our Lord's Resurrection was attested by more than five hundred eyewitnesses, whose experience, simplicity, uprightness and integrity make their testimony unquestionable. The moral courage which the Apostles exhibited in their preaching and spreading of the Gospel of Christ, can be explained only by their message; and the core of their message was the Resurrection of Christ. The fact that thousands and millions believed the testimony of the Apostles, in spite of all the hardships incurred by their belief, and the triumphant march and spread of the Christian Church, can only be explained by the reality of Christ's Resurrection.

The Resurrection completed the work of our salvation. By his death Christ freed us from sin, and by His Resurrection He restored to us the most precious gift of God — our new life of grace.

Easter is **THE** day of joy and happiness for all Christians, because it is the celebration of the greatest victory ever won on earth, the victory over the most unconquerable enemies of mankind, the powers of evil and death. Through His victory over evil and death, Christ gave us the hope and assurance that all His faithful followers will eventually share in this victory.

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The text for this pamphlet was taken from the book *SAINTS AND SACRAMENTS* by Bishop Shnork Kaloustian, pages 71-74.