

## Rest of Souls



The Rest of Souls Service is a devout ceremony conducted for the souls of those who have entered their eternal rest. Literally the Armenian word "ho-ke-han-kist" means "rest for the souls". The Rest of Souls prayer or service is based on the teaching of communion with the saints.

All the Ancient Churches that profess and believe in the immortality of soul, eternal life, resurrection of the dead and the Last Judgment Day have a rest of souls service.

According to the Armenian Church, the souls of the dead rest in a special place before the resurrection - the just and the innocent on the one hand and the sinful on the other stay in a separate place meant for each.

Through this faith Christians pray for the souls of their dead relatives and ask for the intercession of the Saints. They conduct the rest of souls service, open soup-kitchens for the poor and vulnerable families, make donations to churches and elder care homes all asking for God's mercy on the Last Judgment Day for the souls of those who passed away.

The Armenian Church has established the day following the five tabernacle feasts - Holy Christmas, Holy Resurrection, Transfiguration, Assumption of the Holy Mother of God and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, as a day to commemorate and pray for the souls of the dead, mourning day or Me-re-lots.

In addition to conducting the Rest of Souls service on these five days, there are also private services conducted on such occasions as the fortieth day of the death, the anniversary, etc. There is also a custom of blessing the tombs on the mourning

days of the tabernacle feasts as well as on the occasion of the fortieth day or the anniversary. During each Divine Liturgy the dead are remembered by the celebrant priest.

During the Repose of Souls Service special hymns are sung, the Gospel is read and at the end, during the prayer "Christ, the Son of the God" the names of the dead are mentioned and the priest prays that God should have mercy and forgiveness upon them on the Last Judgment Day.

Praying for the souls of the dead is based on the Holy Scriptures and there are a number of biblical chapters referencing it. It states in Ruth: "Blessed be he by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead" (Ruth 2: 20). King Solomon prays for his Father the Prophet David: "O Lord God, do not reject your anointed one. Remember your steadfast love for your servant David." (2 Chronicles 6:42). Another example of the Repose of Souls Liturgy is mentioned in the Apocrypha Book of Maccabees, when Judas of Macabiah organizes a Divine Liturgy for the souls of his soldiers who had fallen in the battle field, (2 Maccabees 12:43-46).

The people of Israel used to offer a holy service for the dead by abstaining from food for several days. For example, the citizens of the town of Jabesh of Galatians fasted seven days upon the death of King Saul (1 Chronicles 10:12).

Thus our Holy Fathers always remembered the dead with prayer, good deeds and abstinence so absolution, rest and heavenly kingdom should be awarded to those who have entered eternal rest with faith.

In the Gospel, Jesus repeatedly mentions about the difficult conditions of being a member of the heavenly kingdom for which the apostles ask hopelessly and amazed: "Who then can be saved?" (Matthew 19:25) And Jesus tells them to rely on God's mercy and charity.

We must remember that the deceased are relieved from the ties of their sins not through their efforts but only through the petition of the church. This intercession is based and conducted by the following words from the Gospel: "Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:18).

The church does not pray for the souls of heathens, heretics, atheists and suicides. As for those who died as true Christians the church asks for God's mercy and expiation of sins for their forgivable sins and not for their deadly sins.

No matter how much the church prays for the dead, no one must remain unconcerned or light-hearted regarding the salvation of his soul, only relying on the prayer which is read after death, because: "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). The day of salvation is now while man lives on the earth and can repent, convert and believe, because he will not have these opportunities when he passes away.