

RAISING SAINTS

CHILDREN + FAMILY MINISTRY // WEEKLY GUIDE FOR TEACHERS + PARENTS

GETTING READY FOR EASTER

Children learn best through experience. Faith development of the young and more mature adults is effective when it is experienced faith. This is accomplished best through the liturgies of the Church which are the lived expression of what we believe in. Jesus taught his followers not through lectures to impart knowledge, but rather he used stories which linked it to their own life experiences as farmers, fishermen, craftsmen, or family members. His listeners could understand the message of the story according to their level of maturation and life experiences.

As we prepare to celebrate Holy Week wouldn't it be better to give our children an experience of living through the events of Jesus' last week of earthly life which led to his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection? The liturgies of the Church help us live and walk that path during Holy Week. This year do try to be present with your children at church for as many of the Holy Week Services as possible. Several of them touch their senses of sight, smell, hearing, and movement. These experiences will remain with them for life, and when they are older it will lead them to learn and understand their faith at a deeper level.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Here are some significant experiences for them which are presented to you for your edification. In the Student Guide we shall focus on some of the practices of Holy Week appropriate for each of the levels.

PALM SUNDAY

Procession with palms – Read John 12:11-13

Opening of the doors service – The focus is pleading for God's mercy to open the doors of Paradise of which

we were deprived because of our sin. The altar curtain symbolizes that and it is opened as the faithful sing a joyous hymn, "*Open to Us the Doors of Your Mercy.*" (*Patz Mez Der*)

HOLY TUESDAY VESPERS

Remembrance of the Ten Virgins, read Matthew 25:1-. It has been customary throughout Armenian Churches worldwide, including parishes of North America to have ten young girls wear shabigs, holding a lit candle during the reading of the above passage from Matthew, and singing the hymn Eemasdoon Goosank / the Wise Virgins. At the end of the service, each girl will draw from a basket containing slips of paper, 5 labeled as "wise" and 5 as "unwise". Those who draw an "unwise" label will extinguish their candle. The remaining 5 with the "wise" label will keep them burning.

HOLY THURSDAY

Liturgy of the Last Supper

Washing of the Feet at Vespers – This too is a wonderful experience for the children to participate in. Even though the practice has usually been to have twelve men's feet washed, however, the instructions in the Book of Directory of Feasts of the Armenian Church (Sołuwgnjg, Jerusalem, 1915) specifically say that all will wash each other's feet as Jesus instructed his disciples to do, John 13:1-14.

Khavaroom – The Passion of our Lord – This service usually follows the Washing of the feet and is basically a series of Gospel readings from all four Gospels about Jesus' betrayal and passion interspersed with psalms and

hymns. It invites people to respond to Jesus' request to his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Sit here, while I go and pray. Matthew 26:36-41. This would be a good experience for our 13-17 year-old students.

HOLY FRIDAY

The Crucifixion of our Lord – A service of Scripture readings at noon about the Crucifixion of our Lord followed by adoration of the Holy Cross. The instructions in the Book of Directory of Feasts of the Armenian Church are as follows: "Place a cross and the Gospel book on a table on the bema. The priest incenses the Holy Cross, the Holy Gospel and the faithful going around the chancel while they sing the hymn **Tone IV Khachee ko Krisdos yergirbakanemk / Before your cross, O Christ, we worship.**

The Burial Service – Vespers of this day focuses on the burial of Jesus. The Tomb of Christ is placed in the Nave or Chancel which would be decorated with flowers that the faithful bring. In front of the tomb is placed the Gospels Book and the Cross which the faithful will come to kiss in adoration at the end of the service.

- In Armenia and in Middle Eastern countries where many Armenians lived, often the months of March and April were not warm enough for flowers to grow abundantly. So, people took wheat sprouts to church to adorn the Holy Table on Holy Thursday and also Christ's tomb on Holy Friday. The symbolism of this tradition illustrates Jesus' own words, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. John 12:24. Jesus was speaking about the necessity for his death and burial so that through his resurrection we may all have eternal life.

Encourage your children to grow the wheat sprouts and bring them to church. The instructions are given below.

HOLY SATURDAY

Holy Saturday is a most solemn day during which we remember Jesus Christ remaining in the tomb. According to Church and biblical tradition Jesus descended into hell and released those who had died into life eternal. The first Easter Divine Liturgy is celebrated on Easter Eve after Vespers.

FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD

Joyous celebration of Christ's victory over death as we proclaim the Easter Introit at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy:

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and through his resurrection he granted us life. To him be glory forever. Amen.