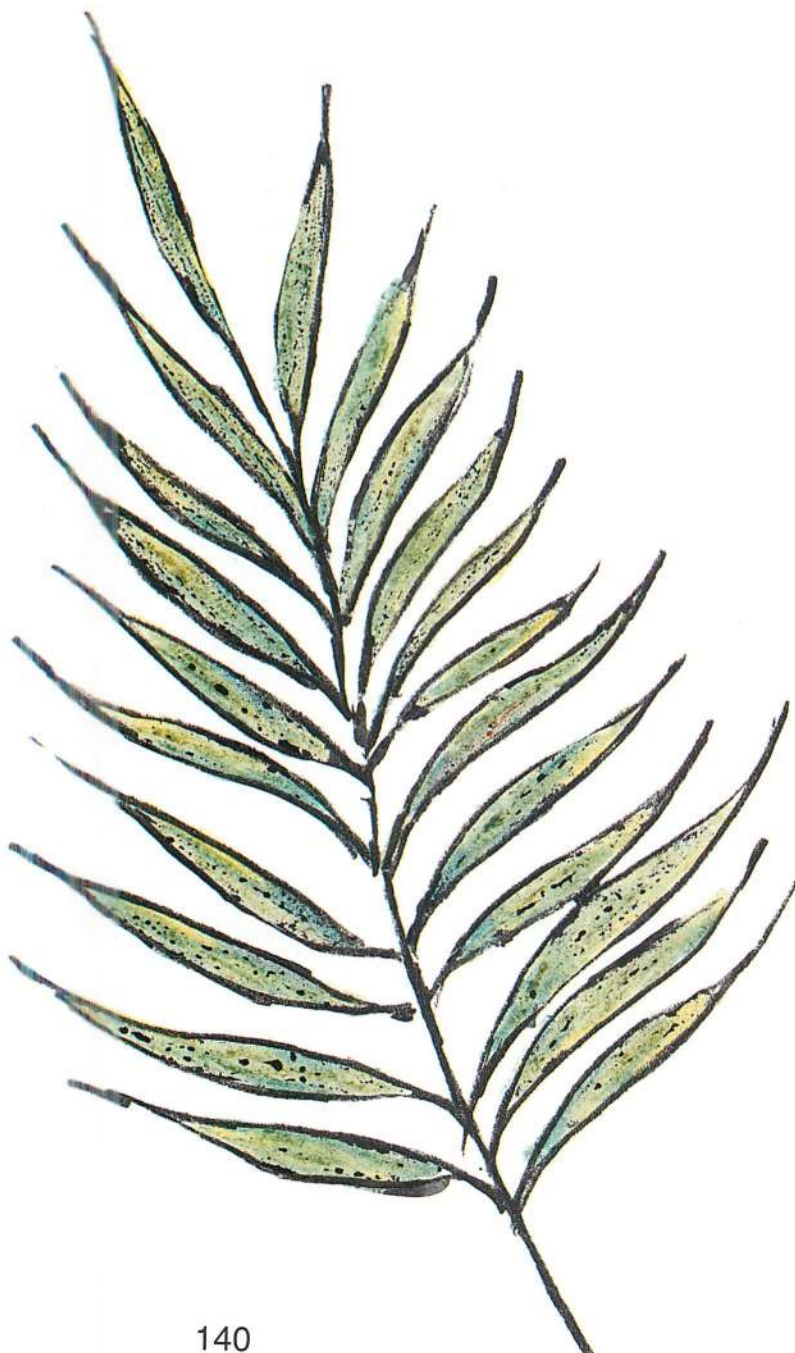


# Lent and Holy Week

I Corinthians 1:20-24



## Purpose

Lent and Holy Week are the season set aside by the Church for self-examination and self-appraisal, to strengthen our character and to renew our Christian faith and our dedication to Christ. The Church invites us to stop busy social schedules, and to use our time to reflect upon and renew our spiritual life.

Because of our isolation and non-communication and the influence of the world, we are not experiencing the fullness of human life that we are capable of when we express Christian love. We have hang-ups and problems of all kinds, fears and worries, bad relationships, weaknesses, and potentialities that grind down or key up our feelings; or we just tolerate all sorts of things because we feel helpless to do anything about them. This is what it is to be in sin, in darkness. Sinfulness means more than telling lies, cheating, stealing, and all the obvious sins. We do commit sins and it is important, if not more so, to recognize the waste of human life which is our real sinfulness. We are not created just to squander our lives in utter mediocrity. This is not what God has promised us, what he wants for us. Life is not meant to be a rat race or the dullness of endless nights in front of a TV screen. The first step in

achieving the fullness of life promised by Jesus is to acknowledge the poverty we have settled for, to allow that our lives are not all that they might be.

## Church's Emphasis

The church brings in a most stirring and moving perspective to our faith as we go through Lent and our Lord's final week with us on earth.

In the Armenian Church, the Sunday preceding the first Sunday of Lent is "Poon Paregentan," the day of good living or carnival day which is comparable to the Mardi Gras held on Ash Wednesday in New Orleans, Louisiana. In the Armenian Church, the day commemorates the time of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and reminds us that man was originally created and is destined to eternal and endless joy with God. Thereafter, each Sunday in Lent reminds us of a basic Christian truth for personal meditation and action.

## Focus

In this unit we will focus on the services held during Holy Week and Soorp Badarak which covers the most important events in the Christian Church. During Holy Week, the emphasis is no longer on the Christian truths dealing with our relationship with God but on Christian truths which reveal what our Lord endured with love for us and for our salvation. We experience the last acts of the Passion of our Lord. These special services invite us to know and to experience Christ in a very personal way and in expectant faith for the power and love of Christ to transform our daily lives. To experience Jesus in our lives is to experience the fullness of life. Our sorrow because of what he suffered is changed to joy because of why he suffered.

We seek satisfaction in a variety of ways, from situations, things, people; and

even after we discover that these "saviors" really do not satisfy, we keep returning to them. God has made us in such a way that we are meant to live in loving communication with himself through Jesus (John 14:6).

During the Holy Week services, we are asked to choose for or against accepting the love of the risen Lord. He was "foolishness" for the Greeks, a "stumbling block" for the Jews and he continues to be the pivotal point of decision. Being a follower of Christ is not a matter of birth or participation in rituals and services, but of decision. This is the decision of faith.

## Conclusion

The Holy Week services call forth from us not an emotional, fleeting spiritual experience but a commitment to Christ; to accept his love and accept him as Lord of our lives. To experience what salvation means is to experience the intimate love of Jesus and to accept that Jesus personally loves each of us. This is what the special services of Holy Week are designed to convey in a compelling way by our Church Fathers who were exemplary in their love of the Lord.



## SUNDAYS OF LENT

The Sundays of Lent following "Poon

Sunday of Expulsion (Genesis 3:1-24)

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Sunday of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

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Sunday of the Steward (Luke 16:1-13)

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Sunday of the Judge (Luke 18:1-8)

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Sunday of Advent (Mark 13:1-37)

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### **At-Home-Work**

*I JOURNAL ENTRY. Read "Heresies" and respond to questions.*

*II Read and study next week's lesson.*

*III Go over today's lesson and Bible readings with your family throughout the weeks.*

"Paregentan" are based on Bible scriptures. Look up the following references and write the Christian truth each reference conveys:

*Monday*  
I Corinthians 1:20-24, John 14:6  
*Tuesday*  
Genesis 3:1-24  
*Wednesday*  
Luke 15:11-32  
*Thursday*  
Luke 16:1-13  
*Friday*  
Luke 18:1-8  
*Saturday*  
Mark 13:1-37

# Heresies

The Church Fathers protected the faith from heresy but heretical beliefs are prevalent in the world.

Heresy arises from constructing doctrine to suit oneself; to mold Christian truth to suit oneself.

Heresy also arises from overstressing one part of the truth. For instance, if we think only of God's *holiness*, we can never attain any intimacy with him, and he remains remote from the world. If we think only of God's *justice*, we can never be free of the fear of God. If we think only of God's love, religion can become a very easy-going sentimental thing. There is a paradox in Christianity. God is love, yet God is justice. Man is free, yet God is in control. Man is a creature of time, yet also a creature of eternity.

Heresy arises from trying to produce a

religion which will suit people, one which will be popular and attractive; one that will be easy to adhere to without discipline and charitable works.

Heresy arises from divorcing oneself from the Christian fellowship. When one thinks alone, he often thinks in error. The Church is the guardian of truth.

Heresy arises from the attempt to be completely intelligible. Here is another great paradox. We are to try to understand our faith but because we are finite and God infinite, we can never fully understand. Even at our most intellectual, we must remember that there is a place for the ultimate mystery before which we can only worship, wonder, and adore.

Jesus was well aware that during the last days, the period of time between his ascension and his second coming, heretics would arise. It was not long before the Church had its heretics who abound today as well.

Give an example of a heresy of molding Christian truth to suit oneself.

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What heresy do you find prevalent in the society in which we live? Explain.

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Which kind of heresy of the five mentioned do you think would be the easiest to fall into? Explain.

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# Turunpatzek

Psalm 118:1, 5, 6, 8, 14, 17-19



## Saturday and Sunday Morning

Holy Week (Avak Shapat) begins with Lazarus Saturday, the first day after Great Lent. Christ raised Lazarus from the dead; the miracle gives us hope of resurrection and everlasting life. (John 11:1-44)

Palm Sunday is the day which commemorates the triumphant entry of Christ into Jerusalem, which represents the heavenly city of God. (John 12:12-19) In Christian and non-Christian symbolism the palm denotes victory. It was on this day that our Lord was proclaimed as the Messiah King of Israel and as such entered the holy capital city.

# Turunpatzek

The Turunpatzek or the Opening of the Doors Service which follows Palm Sunday badarak focuses on our desire for the grace and love of our Lord; our response to his sacrificial and saving love.

The service used to be conducted outside the door of the church proper in the narthex in late afternoon. The altar curtain is now used to take the place of the door of the church and the ceremony is held in front of the curtain. A dialogue is chanted between the congregation and the priest who, behind the curtain, is at the altar which symbolizes the kingdom of God to which we desire entry.

The clergy or deacon representing the congregation knocks and requests entry. The priest from within asks who is knocking and says only the righteous may enter.

The representative of the faithful replies that not only do the righteous enter but also sinners who have been justified through confession and penance. The priest paraphrases what was said and adds, "the kingdom of Christ is the residence of the angels, the place of meeting for the saints, a place of refuge, and the house of God."

The response to the priest is: "It is worthy and true what you say about the Holy Church, our Immaculate Mother, from whom we are born as sons of light and truth. She is our hope of life; through her, we find salvation. She points out the way of righteousness and through her, we ascend to Christ, our heavenly Father."

We need our Mother, the Church. We are saved in the Church, the body of Christ, as a member of her, the bride of Christ, and in union with all her members. If we believe, we are in the communion of faith; if we love, we are in the communion of love; if we pray, we are in the communion of prayer.

Then the choir sings the hymn, "Wise Virgins," based on the parable told by Jesus in Matthew 25:1-13.

Throughout the rest of the service, references are made to John 12:26; Matthew 25:34; Psalm 118:19; and the gospel is read from John 12:44-50.

Before the gospel reading, "Open unto Us Thy Gate of Mercy" is chanted three times with intervals of hymn singing.

## Conclusion

The *Turunpatzek* service anticipates the second coming of Christ and the final judgment. The faithful of the church plead to God through prayers and *sharagans* to re-open the doors of his heavenly kingdom which were closed to man through his fall and expulsion from paradise.

All of our services have a Biblical basis. Our Church Fathers intended for us to live the Bible in our daily lives. They taught us about our faith in the most aesthetic visual, musical, and dramatic services to convey the great truths of our Christian faith.

For our part, we are expected to transfer these truths into a personal experience with our Lord simply by accepting him as the Lord and Savior of our lives.

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# The Fate of the Unprepared

Like so many of Jesus' parables, this one has an immediate and local meaning, and also a wider and universal meaning.

In its immediate significance it was directed against the Jews. They were the chosen people; their whole history should have been a preparation for the coming of the Son of God; they ought to have been prepared for him when he came. Instead they were quite unprepared and therefore were shut out. Here in dramatic form is the tragedy of the unpreparedness of the Jews.

But the parable has at least two universal warnings. (1) It warns us that there are certain things which cannot be obtained at the last minute. It is far too late for a student to be preparing when the day of the examination has come. It is too late for a

man to acquire a skill, or develop a character, if he does not already possess it, when some task offers itself to him. Similarly, it is easy to leave things so late that we can no longer prepare ourselves to meet with God. (2) It warns us that there are certain things which cannot be borrowed. The foolish virgins found it impossible to borrow oil, when they discovered they needed it. A man cannot borrow a relationship with God; he must possess it for himself. A man cannot borrow a character; he must be clothed with it. We cannot always be living on the spiritual capital which others have accumulated. There are certain things we must win or acquire for ourselves, for we cannot borrow them from others.

*William Barclay*

There is an Armenian proverb that says, "You shouldn't leave today's work for tomorrow." Have you ever left something undone and found that it was too late? Explain.

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Have you ever blamed someone else for something that was left undone although it was your responsibility to do it? Explain.

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## At-Home-Work

*I JOURNAL ENTRY. Read "Personal Commitment" and respond to questions.*



*II Go over today's lesson and Bible readings with your family throughout the week.*

*Monday*

Psalm 118:1; 5; 6; 8; 14; 17-19

*Tuesday*

John 11:1-44

*Wednesday*

John 12:12-19

*Thursday*

Matthew 25:1-13

*Friday*

John 12:26, Matthew 25:6, Isaiah 8:18, Matthew 25:34-46

*Saturday*

John 12:44-50

*III Read and study next week's lesson.*

# Personal Commitment

There is a part in accepting Jesus as Lord of our lives that makes it difficult for some people to accept. Christianity primarily has to do with the heart and with the truth, not rituals and rules alone.

Jesus the teacher tells us that he came only to do his Father's will. He also tells us that when we pray, we should first acknowledge God's holiness and then profess, "Thy will be done." The secret of life, Jesus tells us, is to discover the will of God and do it. Jesus says to each of us: "Follow me." To follow is not to lead; it is not to do our own thing, but his thing. This is the

crux of the matter; this is the great stumbling block.

We want to be the lord of our own lives. We want to feel that we are in control. We want to decide for ourselves what is good and bad for ourselves, where we shall go, who shall be our friends, what work we shall do, and on and on even to the smallest aspects of our lives. The most frustrating part of wanting to be the lord of our lives is that our lives include others, in our family, at work, socially; and each one wants the other to be and to behave as he determines. Each wants to be the master of the other, and while he does not like to think of it that way, each wants the other to be his alone. Rebelliousness is rooted in our determination to be self-sufficient lords.

In today's lesson, what have you learned about your "stumbling block" to giving your life to Christ? Explain.

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What will you resolve to do about it? Explain.

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