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## LENT

Lent is intended to commemorate the forty days of fasting of Our Lord (Matt. 4:2). In our Church, as well as in all Eastern Churches, the great fast of Lent begins with the Monday following the Sunday of "Poun Parekentan", and not on Ash Wednesday, as is the practice in the Roman Catholic Church. Lent is a period of forty days counting from the above-mentioned Monday to the evening of the Friday before Palm Sunday.

The whole lenten period, including the Holy Week, is intended to be one of self discipline. In this period, particu-

larly, we should consider our shortcomings, and make efforts to rectify them. It is a time set aside by the Church for self-examination and self-appraisal, to strengthen our character and to renew our purpose in life. None of us is so perfect that no room is left for further moral and spiritual improvement. We all have faults, weaknesses and sins, and Lent is the most appropriate time in which to make penance and to correct them. To achieve this goal, examination of conscience is the first necessary step, followed by a resolution to be more humble, and more gentle, and to exercise self control over our appetites, which is the main principle behind the practice of Lent.

The practice of abstinence is stricter in the Eastern Churches than in the Western. The Western abstinence consists simply in refraining from the use of meat. In the Eastern Churches it consists in abstaining from all kinds of flesh meat, including fish, and all other animal foods, i.e. dairy products and eggs. We know that today not everyone can observe Lent in its strictest form, but everyone can and should observe at least some part of the Lenten obligation according to his individual requirements. We can abstain from certain pleasures, amusements, shows, festive occasions, etc. We can at least devote more time to private prayer, church attendance, and the reading of edifying good books.

In the Armenian Church all Sundays of Lent have meaningful



names, which remind us of various Christian basic truths to meditate upon during that Sunday and the whole week following.

The Sunday preceding the first day of Lent is called in Armenian "Poun Parekentan". "Parekentan" is an Armenian word used for all Sundays preceding a week of abstinence and means "good or happy living". "Poun Parekentan" is the Armenian *Carnival Day*. People who are intending to observe Lent are permitted to give themselves, on this day, to all kinds of feasting and merry making.

According to the Armenian Church calendar this Sunday of "Poun Parekentan" is dedicated to the commemoration of the happy, healthy and care-free life which our first parents, Adam and Eve, enjoyed in the earthly Paradise. This commemoration reminds us of the Christian teaching that man was originally created in a happy state of life, and is destined to eternal and endless happiness by his Creator. The ugly thing which comes between man and his happiness is *sin*, which is disobedience to God's laws, and which is the greatest evil on earth. Sin or disobedience to God's commendments did deprive our first parents, according to the Bible, of their natural happiness. Sin is the only thing which deprives us from our supernatural or spiritual happiness which we shall enjoy in heavenly Paradise.

The second Sunday of Lent is called "*The Sunday of Expulsion*" and commemorates the exclusion or banishment of Adam and Eve from Paradise as a result of their sin of disobedience. It reminds us of the sad consequences of sin. (Read Gen. 3:1-24.)

The remaining Sundays of Lent are named after the Parable of the main Lesson of the day, read during the Divine Liturgy.

The lesson of the third Sunday contains the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), and therefore is called "*The Sunday of Prodigal Son*". It teaches us how to regain the lost paradise.

The fourth Sunday is known as "*The Steward's Sunday*" (Luke 16:1-13). It instructs us to use our intelligence to gain and preserve our spiritual life, to use our wealth to relieve the poor and needy, and to help our churches, so that one day we may be received "into the everlasting dwellings".

The fifth Sunday is called "*The Sunday of the Judge*" (Luke 18:1-8). It reminds us of the importance of prayer in gaining and keeping our eternal happiness.

The last Sunday is called "*The Sunday of Advent*" (Mark, Chapter 13). It reminds us of the last happenings of human history in this world: a) The end of present order of the world; b) The second coming of Christ; c) The resurrection of the dead; d) The Last Judgement; and e) The Inauguration of a new order in the world, "A new earth and a new heaven".

In accordance with the penitential spirit of the Lenten Season, the altars of the Church are closed and Divine Liturgy is said behind closed curtain, in a low voice and in penitential tunes. Besides the regular daily morning service, the Armenian Church has another morning service called "Arevakal" which is generally sung during the Lenten season. This service has beautiful prayers and the hymns which are mostly in supplicative tunes.

In keeping with the spirit of Lent the faithful are expected to abstain from worldly amusements, such as shows and parties. They should devote more time to churchgoing, prayer, penance and other religious exercises.

