

## POON PAREGENTAN

For the overwhelming majority of Armenians, living as they do, in the Christian West, Lenten carnival day evokes images of the Mardi Gras parades made famous in New Orleans and Rio. Revelry and over-indulging of every kind are the order of the day. And yet, *carnival* actually derives from the Latin *carnem levare* meaning “to put away meat,” a reference to the days of fasting that will follow. The Armenian Church marks a day of pre-Lenten festivity, as well, called *Poon Paregentan*, always on the Sunday seven weeks before Easter, this year on February 9.

Actually any Sunday before a week of fasting is called *paregentan*, literally, “good living.” *The paregentan*, *Poon Paregentan*, announces the most important season of fasting in the church year and leads us to its greatest feast, Easter, the feast which not only determines the rest of the ecclesiastical calendar but defines the Church itself.

Over the centuries and throughout the diverse Armenian world, *Poon Paregentan* has been marked by any number of activities from family visiting, games, comic plays, engagements, weddings and, unfailingly, an abundance of food. That is not as unseemly as it might appear since food is indeed the good fruit of the earth and its abundance, a hallmark of Paradise. There in the Garden, the first woman and the first man enjoyed God’s bountiful creation and unending love, and it is that sacred memory that is relived every *Poon Paregentan*.



One of the enduring messages of carnival day is the inherent goodness and joy of life. Trite as that message may appear, it is rarely given its due in the nightly news. Nor, apparently, is the true source of that goodness and joy fully understood.