

Remembering Traditional Lenten Practice

Many traditional practices of the Armenian people are tied with the Lenten period in preparation for the celebration of the glorious Resurrection of our Lord.

One very beautiful and meaningful tradition is that of sprouting wheat in pretty containers a few weeks before Easter. The green growth would decorate the Holy Table on Holy Thursday (AVAK HINK-SHAP-TI) and through Easter.

In Armenia and in the 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 Good Friday (AVAK OORPAT).

Some reflection will help us see that this tradition has a lot of religious symbolism tied to it. We know that each wheat grain has a tiny plant in it, which when planted will grow and produce many more grains of wheat. We also notice that the grain that is planted dies when the new plant grows out of it. The seed must fall into the ground and die before new life grows from it. Isn't this what Jesus taught to us in the gospel of John 12:24-25?

"In truth, in very truth I tell you, a grain of wheat remains a solitary grain unless it falls into the ground and dies; but if it dies, it bears a rich harvest."

As always, our Lord used the example of the grain to teach something of deeper meaning. What he meant was that He had life in Him, like the wheat grain that has life in it. But as long as He stayed on earth, that life would be in Him only, just as the grain would contain the life in itself. It was necessary for Him to die and be buried in the earth, just as the seed is buried when planted, so that through His resurrection many sinful people would be redeemed and have eternal life.

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they are called upon to give up things that are pleasurable, but also as a time to grow further in understanding and accepting the love of God through Christ. This love will help them cultivate their willingness and ability to practice doing things which are pleasant in the sight of God, even if it hurts or causes inconveniences and unpleasantness. Children should be helped to realize that progress, peace and order are secured through people who have disciplined themselves to persevere and endure in the exercise of their will and determination. During Great Lent children can learn by the example of adults that are around them, that to cultivate the life of the spirit one needs to exercise discipline, which is the other side of love. K.K.

This is the crux of our Christian faith, in Christ's death and resurrection we too have a share; we too must die to be resurrected.

We know that death is inevitable for all humans, it was so before Christ's coming too. However, since the Incarnation of our Lord, His death and His Resurrection, our death has been transformed. It no longer is the end of all, but an end with a beginning. We have the hope of being raised at His Second Coming to live with God eternally.

We don't have to wait until the Second Coming to experience the joy of the Resurrection, because during our life we can have a foretaste of the pain of death, and the joy of resurrection. Death is the total loss of one's life, and being. In our daily life all of us experience degrees of personal losses, be they physical or emotional. Death is extremely painful too. Our losses cause pain and suffering, thus preparing us for the eventual total separation. Christian hope through the knowledge of Christ's redemptive work can transform our pains and losses into moments of realization of new life, into the infusion of new strength coming from an unfathomable source, from our Hope and Life, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

It is our responsibility to help our students experience the reality of the Resurrection in their lives according to the level of their development and their ability to understand. You may choose to do this activity with your class as a springboard for further development to our belief in the Resurrection.

YOU WILL NEED:

a shallow container
some cotton and soil (soil is optional)
raw wheat (with skin) or lentils
water

1. Start about the 5th or 6th week of Lent.
2. Spread a thin layer of cotton in the dish and sprinkle some water on it to lay the cotton flat.
3. Next spread the wheat on top of the cotton, covering all areas. The closer the seeds are, the fuller growth you will get.
4. If you have some soil, cover seeds lightly with the soil. If not, then omit this step.
5. Sprinkle with water so that all the seeds are soaked.
6. Cover with Saran wrap and place in a warm corner.
7. Check periodically to keep the seeds moist. Sprinkle with water if needed.
8. When the seeds start to sprout and are about ½ inch high, uncover the dish and place it in a well-lighted place. Some sunshine will help.
9. Make sure plants are always kept moist.

