

God the Holy Spirit, and the Church. After the recitation of the Creed, the deacon chants a ban saying all those who don't believe what the Creed states may not be part of the group gathered to worship God in the Church. Then the priest says, "As for us, we shall glorify him who was before the ages, worshipping the Holy Trinity and the one God-head, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen"



SACRAMENTAL LIFE

PENANCE

This sacrament is one of reconciliation—a coming together again of God and people on an individual basis. The Sacrament of Penance has five major parts. First is the recognition that you have separated yourself from God through sin (disobeying God). You take a good look at how you've been living your life and see if you have been living it the way God wants you to live life. You recognize your sins honestly. Second is admitting true sorrow for having sinned. This is called contrition. Third is confession of the sins to God through his representative, the priest. Fourth is penance—a sort of making up

for sins or doing good to counter-balance the sins. This may include giving alms (giving to charity), prayer, church attendance, doing good works. The fifth part is absolution. The priest hears your confession, assigns an appropriate penance, and then absolves you of your sins—releases you from the consequence of your sins.

As this sacrament is practiced in the Armenian Church today it has been shortened to a group recitation of the General Form for Confession from the pew book. The priest recites the absolution and blesses all the penitents. Then you receive Holy Communion.

Years ago the Sacrament of Penance was done outside of the Badarak. People lived in villages where the church was just a short walk away from where they lived. People could attend church daily or at least more than just on Sundays. The church held daily services and one of many priests assigned to a church was on hand to take part in the sacrament.

Today people in the Armenian Church in America live in widespread communities. Going to church usually involves a long ride over many miles. The shortage of priests makes administering the Sacrament of Penance on an individual basis practically impossible. But the sacrament does exist still in its fullest form and you may want to try going through it during the week with your priest.

One thing is often confused about the Sacrament of Penance. Because it is a ritualistic group confession and absolution just before Communion, many people think that the confession and absolution are part of the Sacrament of Communion. They are not. They are two different sacraments. We experience them one after the other, but they are two separate sacraments. You may choose to receive the Sacrament of Communion following the Sacrament of Penance, or you may not. But if you wish to receive the Sacrament of Communion, you should go through the Sacrament of Penance first.

Also, you must realize that everyone sins every day. You may not go around during the week killing people or committing other major sins, but you do commit some of the sins listed in the confession—eating to excess, being lazy

about something you should have done well, turning away from helping someone, sinning even though you didn't want to or even though you didn't realize what you were doing was a sin. It is good that there is this Sacrament of Penance. It allows you to take a good look at yourself and see how you're doing as a Christian. It gets you back on the right track. It gives you the opportunity to get rid of those things that get between you and God.



WHY?

The Armenian Church is one of the most ancient churches. Christianity started spreading from Jerusalem to the countries around the Mediterranean Sea and to the east. The Church was one then - there were no separations such as Catholic, Protestant, or Armenian. As pockets of Christianity grew, they were identified as "the Church in..." Each city-church was a separate entity but eager to keep in touch with the Apostles and their successors.

With time and distance separating these centers of Christian Faith, the Church had to be wary of false teachings. For instance, a man named Arius taught that "the Son of God was not eternal but was created by the Father from nothing as an instrument for the creation of the world, and that therefore he was not God by nature but a changeable creature, his dignity as Son of God given him by the Father on account of his foreseen righteousness." (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church) The Church in Alexandria led by

Bishop Athanasius condemned this false teaching in the year 320, but the heresy spread.

Emperor Constantine called together the leaders of these city-churches to the Council of Nicaea in 325 to set things straight. The result was the Creed which says that the Father and Son are coequal. All Christian denominations accept the Holy Trinity as stated in the Creed. Representatives of the Church in Armenia attended the Council of Nicaea and the next two councils agreeing to the decisions of those groups.

But difficulties in communication and travel as well as difference in fine points of Christian belief led to the separation of branches of the Church. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 is where the Armenian Church broke away from the others and continued to develop on its own. The decision at Chalcedon said that the Second Person of the Trinity had two natures - divine and human. The Armenian Church and some others said that there was only one nature that was both divine and human. Chalcedon divided the Orthodox Church into two parts - the Greater and Oriental Orthodox Churches. The Armenian Church continued to keep in contact with the rest of Christianity while developing on its own.

Today, Christian denominations keep in touch with each other through organizations such as the World Council of Churches. Although differences exist, we are all one Church.

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