



The Sacraments
of the
Armenian Church

BAPTISM

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The promises the god-father makes at the baptism, for the child, place him under serious obligations. For example, if the parents of the child are neglectful of their duties, or, if they die, it is the god-father who will take care of his god-child until he is old enough to take care of his own education. Here are some of his promises: he should profess the faith for the infant; should renounce Satan; and should guarantee that the child will live according to the obligation that the god-father took upon himself at the Baptism, and according to the life and virtue that are conferred upon it. Here are the words that the god-father says on behalf of the infant, "We renounce Satan and all his devices, all his seductions, all his counsels, all his ways, all his intentions, all his evil angels, all his wicked ministers, all his wicked influences, all these do we heartily renounce."

It should be borne in mind that at Baptism a spiritual relationship is established between the god-father and the god-child, as a consequence it has been the custom of the Church to forbid marriage between the two.

After giving this explanation about the duties and the obligations of a god-father I am sure it is understandable that the parents should be very careful as they make their choice for a god-father.

No adult person is to be forced to be baptized against his will. In the case of an infant's Baptism, the parents are doing just what they should, obeying the command of Christ, presenting their child for Baptism.

What is the Mode of Baptism?

1.) Immersion or Infusion:

This was quite common in the early Church. You know that this is the custom the Armenian Church follows in most cases when the child is an infant. According to this custom the infant is immersed in the baptismal font 3 times, signifying the three days' burial of Jesus. This custom is based on the teaching of St. Paul, explained in the Epistle to the Romans 6:4, "for we were buried with him by means of Baptism into death, in order that just as Christ has arisen from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life." Therefore, by immersion, the old life of sin is drowned and a new life begins. Through it, we die to sin, so that we may live with Christ.

2.) Affusion:

This means the pouring of water over the person or persons. The Baptismal Rite was performed indoors or outdoors in the first Church. When performed outdoors they were usually in lakes or rivers. During the persecutions, the catacombs (tombs) were the site of Baptism, otherwise the baths

inside private houses and large mansions were used. These generally were large sunken areas in the center of the room with several steps leading down into a circular bathing pit. The candidate would stand in the pit while water was poured over him. In these cases often complete immersion was practiced.

3.) Sprinkling or Effusion:

This means to baptize by the application of a few drops or a small quantity of water. This custom is followed with the condition that later on a complete Baptism will be performed. In this custom one or two of the principle parts of the body, the head or the chest is sprinkled with water.

The Roman Church teaches that any of the faithful, whether male or female can baptize, if it's an **emergency** and no priest is available. Even in an emergency a non-Christian can baptize if he uses the formula "I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." In this case then the water and the invocation of the Holy Trinity are considered sufficient to make the Baptism valid.

The Armenian Church has not followed this custom in Her history and does not consider this as valid Baptism. We feel that this was taught or followed because of lack of priests in the Church in the first centuries, but, when the Church began to grow with the well defined duties and existence of priesthood and hierarchy, the Church taught that only those of the faithful who have received special authority at their ordination can administer the sacraments.

In conclusion, let us say that Baptism is the liturgy of Christian Initiation, through which the mind of the child is enlightened; his will is reformed as a result of hearing the Word of God. And more than this yet, Baptism builds the Church, not the Church of stone but the Church of living stones.

I feel that a few side remarks concerning the Baptism could be very helpful:

1.) The Churching of Women:

This is the service which should be performed on mothers who have just given birth to a child. Our Book of Rites (*Mashdotz*) prescribes such a service. Through this, the new mother once more, with an act of thanksgiving, returns to the parish. The priest leads her to the Holy Altar where the heavenly Father is asked to make her worthy of entering into His community to receive Holy Communion.

2.) Announcement of Birth or Baptism:

Announcements for births, or new additions to a family, are sent every year by the thousands. The persons who receive and those who send them,