



WHAT IS GREAT LENT?

Great Lent in the Armenian Church begins seven weeks before Easter with Poon Paregentan, a time of rejoicing and festivity. Paregentan is an Armenian word used for all Sundays preceding a week of abstinence and means "good" or "happy living." Poon Paregentan recalls the happiness and beauty of Paradise and its lord and lady, Adam and Eve. We are reminded that it is only sin that deprives us of that happiness.

Poon Paregentan is the day before a period of total abstinence and fasting begins. The first day of Lent is the Monday after Poon Paregentan and the last day is the Friday before the resurrection of Lazarus, making the total duration 40 days. During these 40 days, we pray, fast and actively serve others as we reflect on our lives and how bleak the world is without God.

Great Lent ends with the resurrection of Lazarus. This Lenten period originally was to prepare those who were to be received into the Church through baptism at the Easter liturgy. As time passed, Lent became a time of preparation for all those in the Church.



WHAT IS "HOLY WEEK"?

The Armenian Church calls the final week of Christ's Life on earth Great Week or Holy Week. During this time, we share His teachings, His suffering, His death and His resurrection.

According to our Church's liturgical calendar, Holy Week has six days. It runs from Holy Monday until Holy Saturday, inclusive. During Holy Week, we commemorate a number of

events. Those events which we focus on liturgically are mentioned below.

Holy Monday—Holy Monday is dedicated to the creation of the world.

Holy Tuesday—On Holy Tuesday we recognize the ten wise maidens discussed in Matthew chapter 24.

Holy Wednesday—Today we remember Judas' plan to betray the Lord.

Holy Thursday—Today we recognize the institution of the Eucharist, and the washing of the feet.

Holy Friday—Today we recognize the crucifixion of our Lord.

Holy Saturday—Today we recognize the entombment of our Lord.

It is the practice of our Church to maintain a fast throughout Holy Week. Also it is appropriate to read some or all of the Holy Week Bible readings. The daily Bible readings for this year are listed at the back of the Diocesan calendar. For further information on Holy Week, a book called *Holy Week in the Armenian Church* is available from the Diocesan bookstore.

MARCH 3—THE SUNDAY OF THE STEWARD: You Cannot Serve God and Mammon

The fourth Sunday of Lent occurs on March fourth this year. The reading for the fourth Sunday of Lent is the parable of the steward, which may be found in the gospel according to Luke, chapter sixteen. This gospel passage is printed below.

He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a steward, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.' And the steward said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the stewardship away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do, so that people may receive me into their houses when I am put out of the stewardship.' So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' The master commended the dishonest steward for his shrewdness; for the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for your-

selves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations.

"He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

In this parable it is primarily interesting to note that Christ gives the example of a steward. A steward is answerable to the one for whom he or she works, that is, their master. Stewards do not own the possessions which they care for. Rather, they keep track of and care for the possessions of another. Analogically, as Christians we are to recognize that we too are called to be stewards of that which belongs to God, remembering that our Lord says, "The world and all that is in it is mine." (Psalms 51). Even as the steward cared for the possessions of his master, so too, Christians are to be stewards of the world and everything within the world.

In relating the parable of the steward, it was certainly not the intention of Christ to commend dishonesty. Rather, he was commending shrewdness. Christ is acknowledging that the sons of this world, (that is, those who are not Christians), are shrewder in dealing with other non-Christians than are Christians. The sons of this world use dishonesty to achieve their goals. And in this world, dishonesty is pragmatically effective. Yet those who are in Christ have no place for such dishonesty in their lives. For this reason, Christians will find it difficult to deal with the world in that they are not shrewd in dealing through evil means. In Christ speaking these words, He is acknowledging that God is aware of the plight of the Christian in today's world. It is difficult for an honest person to deal shrewdly with a fundamentally dishonest world.

Even though God is aware of the hardships which Christians face in this world, He still admonishes us to act shrewdly. He tells us to use unrighteous mammon (money) in order to make friends for ourselves, so that when the money fails our friends will welcome us into the eternal habitations. Sometimes people question the meaning of "unrighteous mammon." Several interpretations of this phrase have been suggested. Since the love of money is the root of all evil, there is a sense in which money itself may be referred to as "unrighteous." Or the term "unrighteous mammon" may be meant to suggest that money which was gathered through unrighteous means. If this is an accurate interpretation, Christ is not suggesting that people acquire money through unrighteous means. Rather, he is stating that people who have gathered money through unrighteous means use that money for good purposes penitentially. In either case, Christ is certainly referring to some, if not all, money as "unrighteous" and suggesting that this money be used for making friends.

It is interesting that Christ says to use "unrighteous mammon" to "make friends." Certainly, true friendship cannot be bought. Yet in acting as a responsible steward

with the gifts which God has given us, in apportioning His wealth in the way one deems to be most appropriate to God's purposes, one does the will of God. And it is only through doing the will of God that true friendships are possible. As Christians, we are called to understand that we are stewards of God's wealth; we are to use His wealth in order to do His will. By using mammon in this way, we will lead others to see the glory of God. And when they see the glory of God, they will be led to see Christ; and when they enter into Christ they become our brothers and sisters, and truly our friends. In this way, we may use money to make friends. It is for this reason that Christ reminds us that if we are responsible stewards with what God has given us, we may be accepted into the "eternal habitations" (that is, the kingdom of God), by our friends.

Christ reminds us that the riches of this world are not true wealth. For to be truly rich is to accept the love of God. All other riches pale in comparison to the riches that are ours in God. In fact, the riches of this world are not riches at all. The riches of this world decay, whereas true riches are eternal.

While the riches of the world are not riches at all, Christ reminds us that we need to act responsibly in dealing with money. We need to commit all we have to the Lord and use it for his purposes, realizing that all we have is His, and we are only caretakers of the things He allows us to have. In this light, we are to even use money for the glory of God. We are to seek to distribute His wealth in the way that would best serve His needs. Mammon is, in fact, not a measure of true wealth. It is for this reason that Christ reminds us in verse eleven that we need to act responsibly with our money if we are to be worthy of obtaining true riches.

Christ tells us that we cannot serve both God and money. Therefore, we have a choice to make. If we find ourselves serving money, then we may be assured that at that moment we are not serving God. Let this then serve as an indicator for us. Let us completely devote ourselves and all that we have to God. Let us seek to serve only Him in all things. And let us remember that Christ tells us, "for what is exalted among men is an abomination before God." Therefore, let us seek to realize that our true riches are in Christ. In this way we may hope to understand wealth in its proper context. Our true riches are in heaven; and we are called to be responsible stewards of worldly "riches."

MARCH 10: SUNDAY OF THE JUDGE

The Gospel reading for this Sunday is Luke 18:1-14. This Bible reading contains two parables. These two parables will be discussed below.

Sunday of the Judge (Luke 18:1-8)

And he told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man; and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Vindicate me against my adversary.' For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear