



## SUNDAYS OF GREAT LENT

The eight weeks or forty days which precede Easter, the greatest feast of the Christian year, is called Medz Bahk or the Great Fast of Lent. During these forty days we prepare ourselves to commemorate the greatest event in the history of mankind, the victory of Christ over death. The eight weeks or forty days call us to repent, change our lives and turn to God in faith, prayer, fasting and deeds of mercy, love and instruction in the faith.

The Great Fast of Lent is a time of limiting our intake of food or eliminating certain foods. This is called *fasting* and *abstinence*. During this time, we are also called upon to give up certain pleasures. All of this is simply to remind us that the only *essential* for life is ultimately Almighty God.

The Great Fast of Lent, is a time of reconciliation. It is a time for getting things right between ourselves and our fellow human beings.

The Sundays of Lent take us through the entire history of humankind, from creation to the glorious second coming. The hymns and Scripture lessons of each day support the meaning of the *Lenten Journey*: that through prayer, repentance, fasting and Christian witness, we can draw near to God once again.

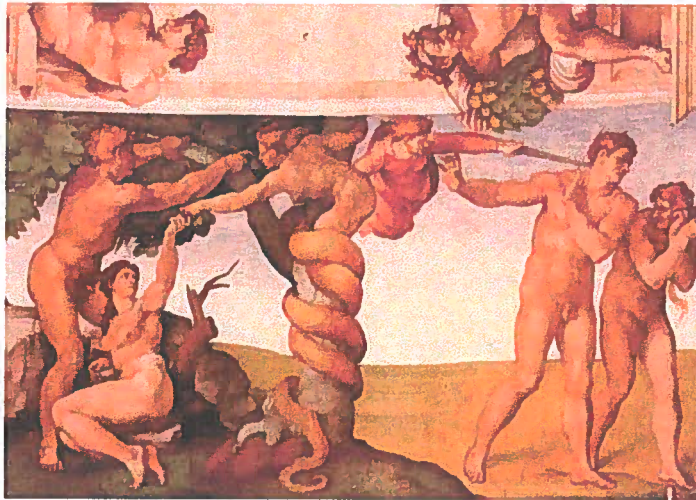


## THE SUNDAYS OF THE GREAT FAST OF LENT

Our Armenian Church takes us through the Great Fast, Sunday by Sunday, by bringing out and emphasizing a particular spiritual truth each and every Sunday. Let us now look at these, Sunday by Sunday.



The first Sunday of the Great Lent is known as the **SUNDAY OF GOOD LIVING**. The Sunday of the Good Life in Paradise in the Garden of Eden. The Gospel readings of the day, teach us about Christian prayer, fasting and sharing. Its lesson is that as God's children, we live in the gift of God's grace and love. As His sons and daughters we can be truly happy and fulfilled when we live in obedience to His will and commandments.



The second Sunday of the Great Lent is known as the **SUNDAY OF EXPULSION**. The Sunday of Exile from the Garden of Eden. The Gospel readings of the day, teach us about the law and the Christian conduct.

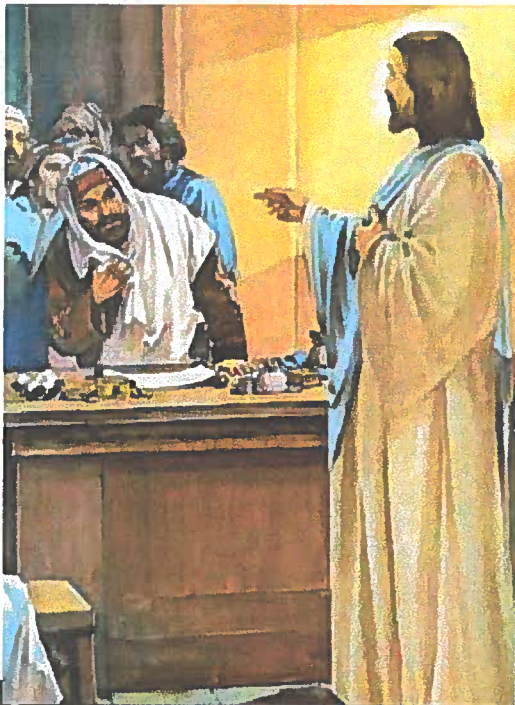
This Sunday reminds us that when we sin by ignoring God's will or break His commandments, we suffer, just as Adam and Eve suffered when they disobeyed Him in the Garden of Eden. All around us, there are constant temptations to put ourselves and our wishes ahead of what God wants. When we do, we sin. We separate ourselves from God, just as Adam and Eve did. Like them, we may even try to hide from God. But we only hurt ourselves when we do so. With each sin God finds us out, and we move further and further away from Him. It is we who expel ourselves from God's presence by our actions and are closed off from God's grace.



The third Sunday of the Great Lent is known as the **SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON**. The Gospel readings of the day teach and declare Jesus' concern for the lost and God's love for the repentant sinner.

The Scriptures indicate that whenever we decide to repent and return to our loving Father's love and grace, He will receive us and forgive us. If all sinners had the courage to ponder on their mistakes and wrongdoings, and repent, then they will become worthy of the Heavenly Father's compassionate mercy.





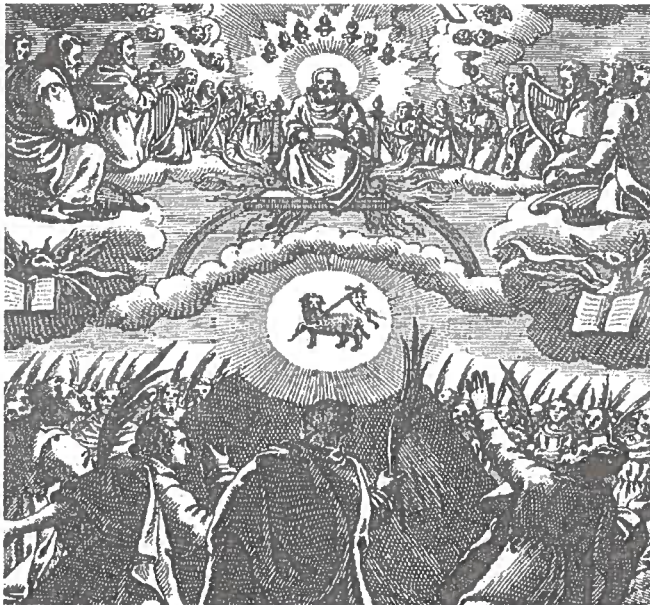
The fourth Sunday of the Great Fast is known as the **SUNDAY OF THE DISHONEST STEWARD**. The Gospel readings of the day recount Jesus' parables that teach us the *prudent* use of material goods, especially during an imminent crisis; to those with responsibility; the uses of wealth, and the Christian attitude toward the rich and the poor. Man was appointed by God as a *steward* in this world. People should therefore perform the duties entrusted to them conscientiously and faithfully. In the Parable, the rich man represents God himself. We as His managers in this world sooner or later, we will have to give account of our stewardship someday.

The misuse of manager's world affairs, is praised and justified, not because they were *just* or *acceptable*, but because the manager managed *wisely* his position to gain favor after his dismissal. If the dishonest manager used wisely his temporal means, seeking happiness and security, how much harder should we work and put effort as God's managers in this world *to gain merit and eternal life*. How much harder should we work for the life that is to come, *a life that is eternal*.



The fifth Sunday of the Great Lent is known as the **SUNDAY OF THE**

**UNRIGHTEOUS JUDGE.** The Gospel readings of the day remind us to be persistent in prayer as well as recognize our sinfulness and complete dependence on God's love and grace. Here, the great lesson which we learn is the lesson of perseverance: We must practice our Christian virtues; We must never We must never cease to hope nor forget the coming Judgment Day. We must never lose hope. We are admonished to remain steadfast and constant in God's grace and our total Christian life. The Scriptures also proclaim the coming kingdom of God and of Jesus Christ, as *righteous Judge*.



The Sixth Sunday of the Great Lent is known as the **SUNDAY OF THE SECOND COMING**. The Scripture lessons of the day teach and inform us that, our resurrected Lord and Savior Jesus Christ surely will come to Judge the living and the dead. We are shown that just as everything begins with Almighty God, everything will one day end with Him. As Christians and followers of our Lord Jesus Christ, on this Sunday, we should be looking forward to the Second Coming of Christ. We are shown that He stands as the complete Lord and Sovereign of the past, the present and the future.

One day, we will all be called to give account of our life and judged accordingly. We are called to always be ready.

**THE RAISING OF LAZARUS.** The Saturday on the eve of Palm Sunday, the Church celebrates the Miracle of the Resurrection which Jesus performed on His dead friend Lazarus. This glorious act is to be understood only as the foreshadowing act of Jesus' own divine Resurrection.

### **AVAK SHAPAT THE GREAT AND HOLY WEEK**

Although Holy Week is a very short period, it is the most eventful and important church period for all Christians. During this time, the church follows closely the last scenes of our Lord's Life.



Great or Holy Week is a solemn celebration of the important and final redemptive events of Christ's earthly life, especially His entry into Jerusalem, His Last Supper on Great Thursday, Crucifixion and entombment on Great Friday and His triumphant Resurrection on that first Easter morning.

In order to truly understand our Great Week celebrations, it is necessary to seriously listen to the Scripture Readings and lessons proclaimed at each liturgy. These scriptural selections not only recreate the grief, pain and suffering of the Son of God during His last week, but also enrich our spirits with His teachings/preaching and merciful miracles which are climaxed at His Resurrection.



**PALM SUNDAY:** The Sunday of Flowers and Palms. This is the day of Jesus' victorious entry into Jerusalem, and the love that the crowds showed for Him, waving palm branches and shouting "*Hosanna!*" This

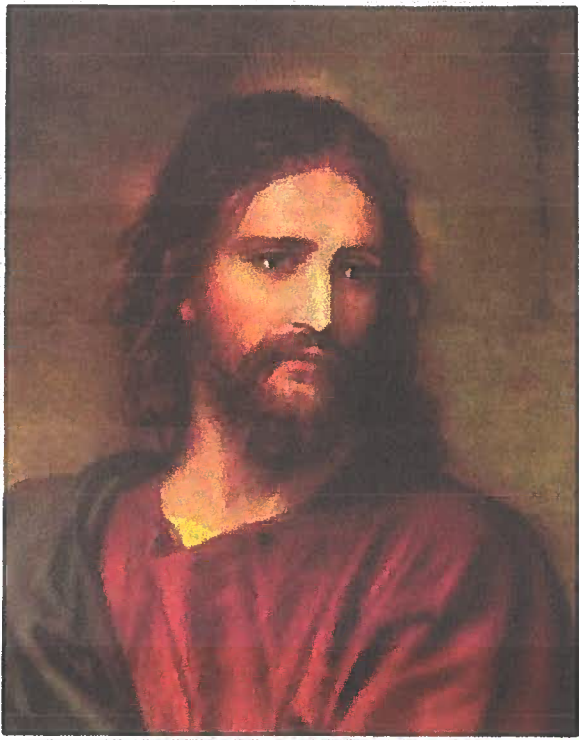
Great city of kings and prophets received Him with great joy as a new king, Savior and a deliverer. The children and old men came to meet Christ seated humbly upon a donkey.

On the evening of Palm Sunday, ceremony of the **OPENING OF THE DOORS** is celebrated. This service is unique to the Armenian Church, during which the priest

knocks at the altar, the curtain is opened again and we, the Church, are re-united with God. We are with Him again, as the people of Jerusalem were with Christ on the first Palm Sunday. Even though we are sinners, God still loves us enough to take us back when we repent and turn to Him.

Opening of the Gates, proclaims and celebrates our entrance to the heavenly Jerusalem after Christ's second coming and brings to mind the picture of the day of the Last Judgment. The final day of judgment is not a condemnation, but rather an occasion of confession, repentance and prayer, which are the only way to enter the *heavenly doors* of salvation.

**GREAT MONDAY:** During the first days of Holy Week, as well as throughout the week, morning and evening services are celebrated with sharagans and abundant Scriptural readings. On Monday, the scriptures help us remember the story of Creation, man's fall into sinfulness as well as the story of the barren fig tree, which Christ withered because it bore no fruit. On this day, the faithful are invited to remember the lesson that we are created in the image of God, and we are called to



examine our inner selves and with clean hearts and thoughts renew our faithfulness and transform our lives and bear the fruits of virtue.

**GREAT TUESDAY:** On this day we read the story of the ten maidens, five of whom were wise enough to put oil in their lamps while they were waiting for the bridegroom to come and take them to a wedding feast. This story, as well



as the sharagans and the lessons convey the message of the last Judgment and appeal to us that we must always be ready and waiting for Christ, the Groom to come.

**GREAT WEDNESDAY:** During this day we remember two contrasting lessons; the betrayal of Jesus and the worshipful anointing of Jesus' feet to show her love and respect for Him.

Examining our lives and comparing them with the two types of contrasting acts, the church asks God? Are you your desire for position? Or, God and share humankind?"

"What are you doing as a child of betraying your Lord with your greed, hedonistic pleasure and for social do you faithfully and lovingly worship your gifts for the good of all



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**THURSDAY:** On Holy Thursday we most important event of Christ's life. Supper, at which He gave Holy



Communion to His disciples, the same Holy Communion that we can share during every single BADARAK. We have BADARAK in our churches on this day, and remember the first Holy Communion shared by Christ and His disciples.

With prayers of confession asking for forgiveness, we prepare ourselves for the sacrament of Holy Repentance.

The night and morning hours of song on this day celebrate Christian love and Christ's redemptive work. We remember Christ's spoken words "Since the light is with you, believe in the light and be children of light" (John 12:3).



*Jesus Washing Peter's Feet*

The evening of Holy Thursday is also a very special time. We remember how Jesus washed the feet of His disciples in the service called *WASHING OF THE FEET*. Jesus washed His disciples' feet to show them that they must be ready to serve all men.

On the same Thursday night, we have another service called KHAVAROU, VIGIL OF THE NIGHT OF SUFFERING AND DARKNESS. Here we commemorate Jesus' betrayal, His arrest, trial, and suffering. Peter's denial and Jesus' facing death alone. Six canons of Gospel lessons are read describing Jesus being bound and tried. Twelve candles are lit and at the completion of each order of scripture readings and lessons two of the candles are extinguished. After the Bible readings, the lights of the church are all suddenly put out. A single candle is left to remind us of Christ's singular presence in the darkness. The service of Holy Thursday (Maundy), prepares us to remember the suffering and crucifixion of our Lord on Good Friday.



**GREAT GOOD FRIDAY, DAY OF CRUCIFIXION AND BURIAL.** Today we commemorate Jesus' crucifixion and burial. The sober liturgy of crucifixion brings us all the scriptures that foretell Jesus' death upon the cross. In the evening we tell the story of Jesus' burial. In the church, we symbolically decorate Jesus' tomb, in front of which

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biblical passages of deliverance are read foreshadowing God's victory over death, evil and the darkness, at the same time preparing us to receive and celebrate Christ's victory over death and His Resurrection.

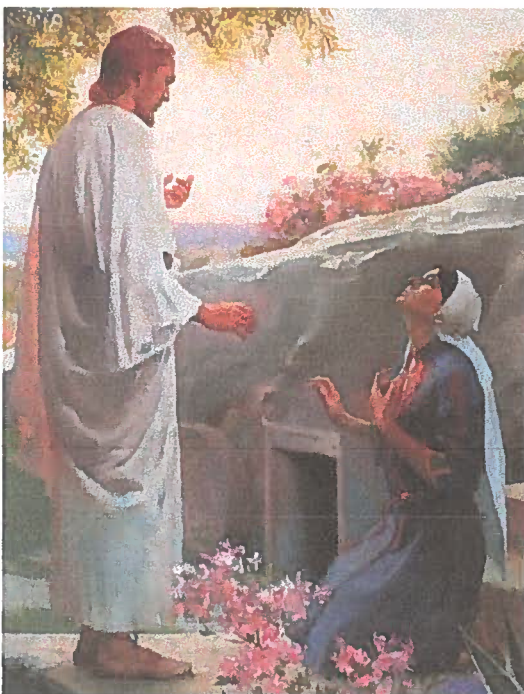


clergymen kneel and sing "Soorp (Holy, Mighty and Immortal God), according to tradition, Joseph of sang as Jesus was lowered from Joseph, because he loved Jesus, that Our Lord's body was and decently buried.

churches have the custom of Jesus' tomb with a procession Nakhadonag. After the Nakhadonag, we sing "We kneel Your Cross" to strengthen our inspire ourselves through the the Cross.

**SATURDAY:**

(JURAKALOOYTZ) which "lighting of candles". During this read from the Old Testament, the story of the Creation of the the Genesis. This reminds us we celebrate the Resurrection of are celebrating the creation of life that Jesus gave us. Other



On Easter Eve, since the feast has already begun, Divine Liturgy is celebrated. We read the story of Christ's Resurrection in Matthew 28:1-20. It is a special aspect of Easter celebrations that homes are decorated with lighted candles.

**EASTER SUNDAY: THE FEAST OF RESURRECTION.** *"Christ is risen from the dead! He trampled down death by*



*death, and by His resurrection He granted life to us. Glory to Him for all ages".*

With the services of Easter Sunday, the whole mood of the church changes. We have been sad and solemn during Lent and Holy Week. Now, with the celebration of Christ's Resurrection and the new life that He gives us, everything becomes bright and joyful. The words KRISDOS HARYAV EE MERELTZ are happily declared again and again during the service. Everyone wants to receive Holy Communion, to share in the gift of new life. All has been changed, and death can no longer defeat us because we, as true and faithful followers of Christ, have been promised that we may share in His everlasting life.

On this day, we read the Gospel story of how the women who went to anoint Christ's body in the tomb found out that He had risen from the grave.

At Easter, we recall and relive the most important event in human history. That event is Jesus Christ's victory over death. This in fact is the foundation and cornerstone of Christianity and Christian faith and at the same time Christ's Resurrection is the strongest affirmation of God's unlimited power even over death.

Let Christ's miraculous Resurrection be the victory of our spiritual awakening and spiritually active life.

