

For Those Who Sleep

What Does Scripture Say?

Often we must remind ourselves that our Christian tradition has its roots in the writings of the Old and New Testaments. The Church has always used Scripture as a means of clarifying the "faith."

Let's take a look at the following passages which deal with our praying for the dead and remembering in prayer our unity with their "eternal" souls.

Explain briefly each of the following passages:

- a. Ephesians 4:15, 16
- b. Romans 14:8, 9
- c. 2 Timothy 1:18
- d. 2 Maccabees 12:43b-45
- e. Revelation 14:13
- f. Ruth 2:20

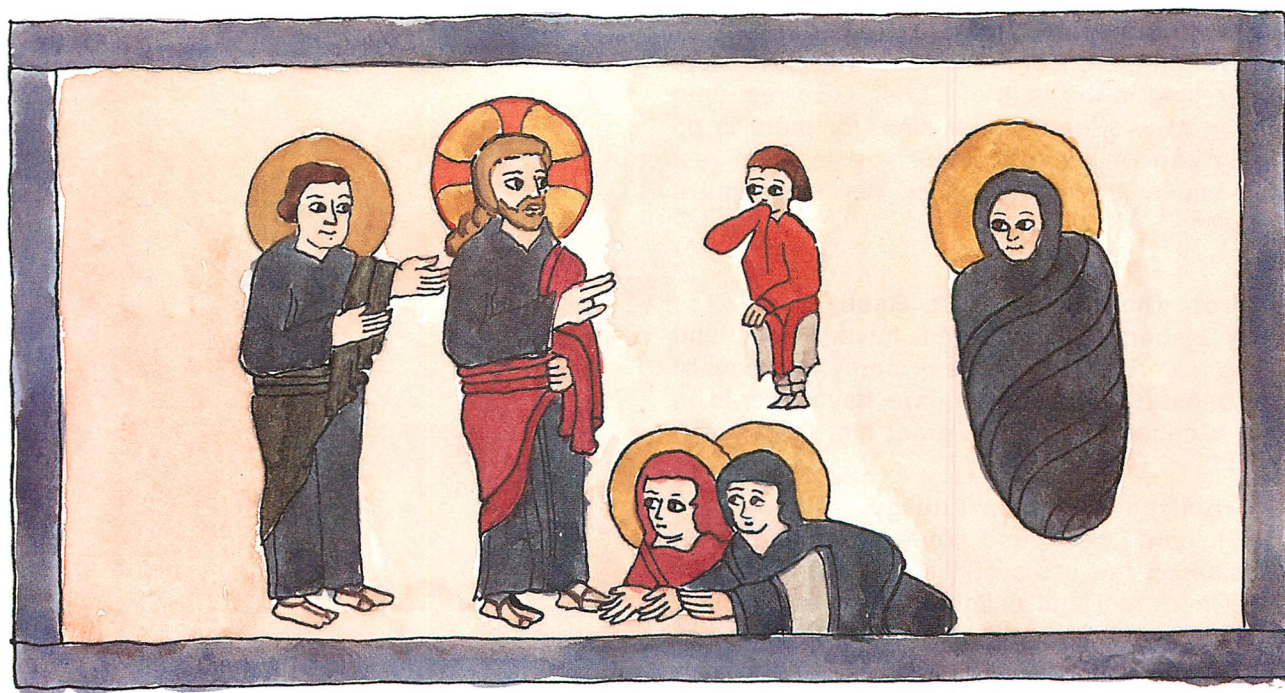
In Christ We Are One

The Church has always proclaimed our collective unity in Christ. In him, through him and with him we are his and each other's.

The worship, prayer, and sacraments of the Church always enable us to experience that unity: in baptism we become spiritually related; in Holy Communion we maintain our spiritual unity with one another; in prayer we express our unity.

But the Church is not just on this earth. The Church is eternal, and her members live in this time and the time to come.

Often we think that our association with each other is ended when the power of death "destroys" our relationship. However, that's not the case. Our loved ones who have died and left



this earth are still very much with us. We still maintain a spiritual bond, and this is done through prayer.

As members of Christ's body we are "militantly" striving to keep and protect his gospel — preaching and teaching; but there are those whose work on this earth has ended and who have succeeded or "triumphed" in keeping the gospel or Truth. Thus the Church in her two dimensions is both Militant and Triumphant, comprising those alive in Christ and those who have departed in Christ.

In the Early Church

The fact that praying for the departed has been seen as a definite part of Christian tradition and faith from earliest times can be shown from the following communal prayers from early liturgies:

1. From the Liturgy of St. James.

"Remember O Lord, the spirits of all flesh, of whom we have made mention, and of whom we have not made mention who are of the true faith . . . do thou give them rest there in the land of the living, in thy kingdom . . ."

2. From the Liturgy of St. Mark.

"Have mercy, O Lord, on those who have slept and rested in the faith of Christ. Give rest unto their souls . . . remit their sins, for there is no one clean or without blemish, give them rest and make them worthy of the kingdom of heaven."

3. From the Liturgy of St. Basil.

"Remember, O Lord, and have mercy and bless according to thy great mercy, the soul of thy departed whose name we have offered in this sacrifice to God . . . grant him rest."

4. From the Armenian Liturgy.

"Be mindful, Lord, and have mercy and compassion on the souls of them that are at rest. Give them rest and enlighten them and reckon them among thy saints in the kingdom of heaven and make them worthy of mercy. Be mindful, O Lord, especially of the soul (n).

With Holy Communion is established a triune unity of the Church.

— With and to Christ.

— With and to each other (the living).

— With and to those who now rest "in him" (the departed).

Write your own prayer of remembrance for the departed, listing why you remember them and your particular love for them.

Use the prayers and hymns from the *hokehankisd* as a guide.

ples with response, pages 9a, 20a; or they may write their own.)

e. Breaking of bread prayer. Write a prayer of what bread means to you as a symbol of sharing, nourishment, life, etc.—bread is broken and shared among all present.)

f. Prayer (Write a prayer of what wine means—the cup of wine is now passed to all present.)

g. A prayer of St. John Chrysostom, and hymn, Amen Yeghitz (Divine Liturgy book, pages 45a, 46a.)

h. Lord's Prayer.

This can be completed for homework. (15 min.)

Session 3—For Those Who Sleep

Key Concepts

1. Praying for the dead has always been and still is the expression of love and concern of the believing community.
2. Through our worship at the Divine Liturgy, we express as community our certainty that all those who sleep in Christ in faith and in hope of resurrection are still alive in him.
3. In receiving Holy Communion we are united with all believers, those living and those dead, because we are all alive in Christ. (Romans 14:8,9)

Objectives

Students will

1. Read from the Bible how both Jews and Christians honored the dead with prayer and remembrance.
2. Study and explain the prayers and hymns of the requiem service.
3. Compare the prayers of early Christian worship with how other Christian communities expressed their love for those who rested in Christ.
4. Write their own prayers for remembering the souls departed from this life.
5. Define the terms militant—alive and awake on earth; and triumphant—alive but asleep in Christ.
6. Explain Holy Communion as *the link* between themselves and the souls of the departed.

Background for Teacher

"If we live, we live to the Lord and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." (Romans 14:8-9)

This biblical passage beautifully explains how we, the believing community, the Church, understand our relationship to each other. It is in Christ that we are bound to each other, and because of him nothing can separate us from that unity.

Death has always been understood as a power of separation, but Christ's own death destroyed that

power and enabled us to maintain the "bond of the souls" which transcends this physical and material earth because the soul is immortal (without death) and everlasting (eternal). Physical death is merely a temporary wedge in our spiritual unity that will be "restored" with the final resurrection as stated in the Nicene Creed: We believe "in the resurrection of the dead, in the everlasting judgment of souls and bodies, and in the kingdom of heaven and in the life eternal."

Since its creation, the church community has always prayed together, physically and spiritually (the living and the dead).

To this day we uphold this tradition. We acknowledge the value of the soul and its need for our personal and communal prayers.

During the Divine Liturgy the remembrance of those who now rest in Christ is offered by the priest on behalf of all present. The Holy Sacrifice (*Soorp Badarak*) is for them as well. (Holy Communion includes their spiritual presence). By receiving Christ, we are united to all whom he has created.

The Armenian Church has a unique service through which the faithful are enabled to express their love and compassion for the souls of her members who rest in Christ. The service is called *Hokehankisd*, meaning the resting/sleeping of the soul.

We, who are like soldiers in Christ's army, actively pray for those who have triumphantly advanced towards God's kingdom. This is why the church is understood as a dual reality, militant and triumphant, all still one body.

As the soldier actively strives for safety and peace, we also actively pray for the safety and peace of the souls who have left our physical presence. It is a Christian duty, not merely a quaint tradition. It is a responsibility placed upon us at our baptism by which we keep the community whole at all times.

This lesson will demonstrate how the whole community maintains the bond of unity through our prayers for those who now sleep in the Lord.

Materials Needed

- Divine Liturgy books
- Bibles

Procedure

1. Opening prayer service: The students will perform the service which they themselves wrote as part of the last class session. (10 min.)
2. Discuss with them briefly what they think about the soul at the time of death. What is the value of remembering the departed? Why should we do this as a community and even as individuals? Allow them to share their answers with each other. Conclude with the statement that Christians believe that when one's earthly life ends, he or she sleeps in Christ's

presence until awakened at the final judgment day and that, though they are not physically with us, they indeed are very much a part of the church. (5 min.)

3. Read "What Does Scripture Say" in the student text, and then have students read Bible references about praying for and remembering the dead, and their relationship to the living.

Points to emphasize:

a. Ephesians 4:15,16 (We are all part of the body of Christ.)

b. Romans 14:8,9 (The living and dead are one in Christ. There is no separation after death.)

c. 2 Timothy 1:18 (May God grant mercy unto his soul asleep in Christ.)

d. 2 Maccabees 12:43b-45 (Our prayers help make atonement for the souls of the dead.)

e. Revelation 14:13 (The dead are not forgotten but are remembered especially for their deeds.)

f. Ruth 2:20 (God's kindness is both for the living and the dead.) (10 min.)

4. Read together "In Christ We Are One" on page 93.

Ask the students what it is that maintains our unity with the departed? (We are one in Christ through baptism; through prayer; through Holy Communion.)

Let the students discuss briefly how the mystery of Christ binds us together.

The Holy Communion binds us to Christ, to each other, "the living," and also "to the souls who now rest with him." Thus Holy Communion presents a triune relationship. (5 min.)

5. Now look at excerpts of prayers from our liturgy and other liturgies, and read how the believing community remembers those physically not present ("In the Early Church"). (5 min.)

6. Open Divine Liturgy books to page 49, (The Service for The Repose of Souls). Read together prayer/hymn and ask: "To whom is each verse addressed?" (Jesus Christ—key words: God the Word, v.1; Incarnate, v.2; Give up Ghost, v.3; Distribute bounties, v.4.)

"In what state are these departed souls?" (Asleep—the term *hokehankisd* means "the resting" (hankisd) "of the soul" (hokeh.)

"What is asked?" (Forgiveness of sins.)

"Why?" (For the "final" judgment, the second coming of Christ.)

Explain here the Armenian Church's teaching about the soul after death:

The soul now rests and waits for the final judgment when it shall be re-united with the new body in God's presence, as stated in the Nicene Creed "in the everlasting judgment of souls and bodies." However, the souls of the departed do receive temporary judgment of either "joy" or "torment"—according to what each has done. Through the prayers of the living faithful the cleansing or redeeming of the "sleeping souls" can take effect, preparing them for the "final day," as Saint Paul teaches.

"If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body." (I Cor. 15:44)

"Just as we have borne the image of man from the dust, we have also borne the image of the man of heaven." (I Cor. 15:49)

"We shall all not sleep, but we shall all be changed." (I Cor. 15:51) (10 min.)

7. Now read the prayer on page 62 in the Divine Liturgy book: "O Christ, Son of God, forbearing and compassionate . . ."

Point out that it is the militant church (we) who pray for the triumphant church (the departed) who are now closer to the kingdom, at the doorway, the threshold of eternity (this being their triumph), awaiting God's mercy and his receiving them with all the "saints." (5 min.)

8. Reflecting on the passage from 2 Maccabees 12:44 and the need for the community's prayers, have students compose their own short prayers of requiem in which they can ask Christ our God to grant mercy, forgiveness, rest, and peace for the souls of their family members who now rest with Christ. (10 min.)

Session 4—Behold the Lamb of God

Key Concepts

1. Sacrifice and thanksgiving rooted in Old Testament ritual have become the model for many liturgical services of blessing.

2. Christ is the center of sacrifice and thanksgiving for the New Testament church.

3. The Christian community expressed sacrifice and thanksgiving in all areas of community celebration and worship.

Objectives

Students will

1. Read scriptural depictions of "The Lamb."

2. List personal sacrifices they have made as a means of expressing thanks.

3. Examine the ritual of *madagh* as a sacrifice, as thanksgiving.

4. Create their own ritual and order of *madagh*.

Background for Teacher

The offering of lamb in the courtyard of the temple was very much the expression of the Jew's thanksgiving to God for the abundance of his blessings. This practice in the Jewish synagogues was a normal one for the truly righteous and faithful. The lamb became associated with the total offering to God of oneself and one's possessions. The offering was pure and without blemish, and only lambs that were without