

Unit One: A Community Over Time

Lesson 7

The Sacraments

Pray Together

Hanoon Hor, yev Vortvo, yev Hokvooyn Surpo, Amen.

Lord, you who once called us to the holiness and the enlightenment of baptism, we pray you, make us worthy of your most precious grace. Help us to always put off the old garment of sins and be renewed daily into a new life in you. Fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Adapted from the prayer of baptism of the Armenian Church



Quick Quiz

Mark the correct answer.

1. St. Athanasius was opposed to the ideas of a priest named
a Drtad b Pilate c Arius d Nersess
2. Khosrov Antzevatzi called the Divine Liturgy a
a great medicine b service of beautiful hymns
c chance to read Scripture d great work of art
3. Who thought Mesrob Mashtots' plan for an Armenian alphabet was a great idea?
a Caesar Augustus b St. Gregory the Illuminator
c Gomidias Vartabed d Catholicos Sahag
4. _____ climbed Mt. Ararat to look for Noah's Ark.
a Catholicos Aristakes b King Drtad
c Ghevont Yeretz d Soorp Hagop of Medzpin
5. St. Justin the Martyr first heard the Gospel in the city of
a Ephesus b Rome c Jerusalem d Constantinople

Milestones in Our Christian Life



Everyone's life has "milestone" moments.

A milestone is literally a stone that marks the distance from a given point. If you had to mark off your life so far in milestones what would they be? Label them below:

BIRTH

TODAY

Members of the *Christian* family have milestones as well. They mark important moments of a believer's life at which time – although he is with us at *all* times - God is *especially*, mystically present. The word mystical is important here, since the exact nature of how our human experience and God's presence intertwine at these moments is beyond words. In Armenian, the word for "sacrament" is *khorhoort* which literally means "mystery."

The church has named each of these occasions a "sacrament" and while there are many such moments, the church has marked off seven formal 'rite of passage' sacraments.

1. After our physical birth, at which time we become part of a human family, we are born again spiritually, becoming members of *God's* family – the Body of Christ – through **Baptism**

During baptism, we are immersed in the water of the font three times, sharing in Christ's death and resurrection. Our godparents promise to help us grow in our faith. All our friends and family are present as witnesses. In the early church, this was performed at church with the entire community present.

Today, baptisms are private affairs, with just the immediate family attending. Why do you think baptisms were once done with the entire community present?

2. Moments after we are baptized, we experience the sacrament of..... **Chrismation**

We are sealed with holy oil, a sign of the Holy Spirit gracing us with the strength and understanding to live a faithful life. Nine parts of the body are anointed – the forehead, eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, hands, heart, back and feet with holy muron—"the oil of gladness" (Hebrews 1:9).

Why do you think these places were chosen to be anointed? What might they represent?

Immediately following Chrismation, we are dressed in new white clothes and presented to the altar to receive our first Holy Communion (more on that later).

We are now fully participating members of the Armenian Church – right from infancy!

3. Sunday Badarak is the weekly invitation by Jesus to continue sharing in his life-giving Body and Blood through the bread and wine of Holy Communion. But as we grow, we are asked to face very seriously the ways we may have "missed the mark" in aiming for a truly Christian life. Sin is the religious word for missing the mark and before communion we have the beautiful opportunity to think about our sins and ask forgiveness. That confession, whether private or the ritualized confession we do at church is the sacrament of **Penance**

The priest has been granted the privilege to release us from these sins. We are given the chance to start all over again – like a new beginning every Sunday. (It’s no accident that Sunday is the first day of a new week!)

Why do you think it’s important to really think about your sins and seek forgiveness?

4. The ultimate sacrament for every Christian is **Holy Communion**

This sacrament was established by Jesus himself at the Last Supper, when he took bread and wine and shared it among his disciples as a sign of the New Covenant and a sign of eternal life with him through his own Body and Blood. We should receive Holy Communion whenever we are in church, as it is the whole point of being there!

5. Many people will have the experience of finding a life partner and form their own new family. This is the sacrament of **Holy Matrimony**

Or more commonly known as.....marriage! Of course, getting married in the church is just the beginning. A religious billboard campaign once posted a huge highway sign that said: “Loved the wedding; now invite me to the marriage. Love, God.” It takes a lifetime of commitment to turn the sacrament of matrimony into a God-centered marriage.

6. When a person answers the call to give his life to ministry in the church, he might prayerfully speak with his pastor and bishop about it, enter a school of theological studies known as a seminary (our own seminary in America is St. Nersess Armenian Seminary), and ultimately experience the sacrament of **Holy Orders**

This is one of those sacraments, one of those “milestone” moments that are very specific – a person choosing a vocation in the church – which most Christians don’t experience. But if you ever have an opportunity to attend an ordination – go!

There are three basic orders in the church: deacon, priest and bishop. Before these, come what are called the “minor orders,” all of which fall under the name “tbir” or clerk. Many boys and girls serve the church on Sundays by assisting as acolytes or singing in the choir and undergo these orders.

Why do you think it might be exciting to serve the church in an ordained ministry?

7. The sacrament which brings healing and prayer to the sick is called, reasonably enough, the sacrament of **Prayers for the Sick or Final Anointing**

Why a sacrament which suggests two purposes (why pray for healing if it’s ‘final’)? Well, originally, the “final anointing” was intended for the dying. Over time, this was reserved for clergy only. Prayers for spiritual healing, accompanied by anointing with holy oil (although not *muron*), was offered to all the faithful at times of illness. If you ever have a family member who is in the hospital or very ill, ask your priest to visit and pray and anoint your loved one. Go with him on the visit.

Words to Live By

“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.”

Romans 8:28

Back to the Bible

The Armenian Church looks to Scripture for the origin of our sacraments. Below are Bible verses that describe each sacrament. Look up the Bible verse; then draw a line from each passage to the sacrament it describes.

1. Matthew 18:18

Holy Orders

2. Genesis 2: 24

Holy Communion

3. John 1:32

Anointing of the Sick

4. Mark 14:22-24

Marriage

5. Hebrews 5:4

Penance

6. John 3:5

Baptism

7. Mark 6:13

Chrismation/confirmation



Did You Know?

Two sacraments may not be repeated: baptism and ordination. Interesting! They both mark the start of a new life in Christ.

Our Armenian Way

When a baby is born to an Armenian family, planning for the baptism, chrismation, and first holy communion begins almost immediately. The family is excited to introduce the baby into God's family. During the baptism, the baby is immersed three times into water, symbolically "dying" (Christ was in the tomb for three days) and being born again into a new life in Christ. Chrismation (sometimes called confirmation) seals this commitment with the Holy Spirit, then the baby receives holy communion. This way, even a very young child can be a fully participating member of the Armenian Church!

