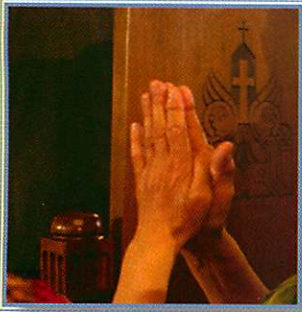


Unit One: A Community Over Time

Lesson 1

What Is Holy Tradition?



Pray Together

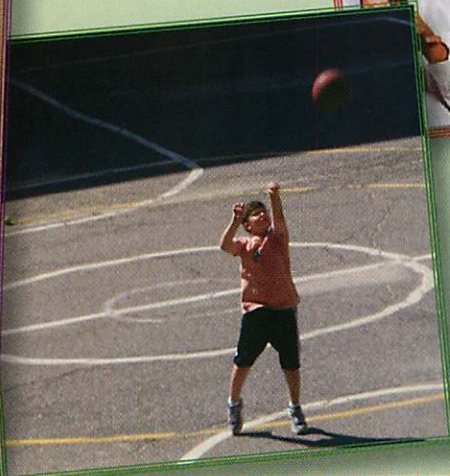
Hanoon Hor, yev Vortvo, yev Hokvooyin Surpo, Amen.

Dear Lord, I pray that I might
be honored with clothing of light, from which I have been stripped
touch the hand of Him, from whom I am separated
receive my daily bread, for which I have not worked
be showered with rewards which I have not earned
remember all my blessings which I always forget.

Prayer 24, St. Gregory of Narek

Identify Yourself!

On the paper provided, note some of the things that make you who you are. Do not write your name on the paper, as you will be using it in a guessing game. Some of the things that go into your identity may be what school you go to, your brothers and sisters, sports you like, where you were born, your nationality, what languages you speak, favorite activities, and your friends.



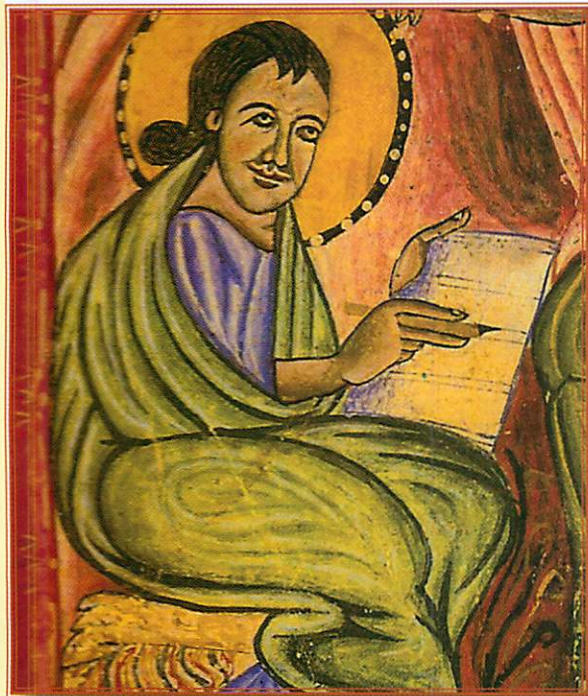


Identity and the Armenian Church

What if you woke up tomorrow with amnesia? Imagine you can't remember what your name is, where you live, where you are supposed to go to school, or who is in your family. Your day would be a disaster! You would not know what to think or do. The Armenian Church is like a person in that it has to understand its true identity in order to function correctly. As you develop your sense of who you are from the things that you know to be true, our Church also possesses a body of truth about itself. Every believing community, in fact, interprets the life and teachings of Jesus Christ in a very specific way.

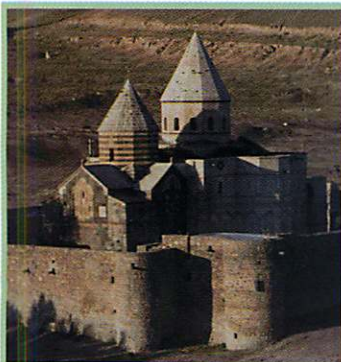
This knowledge base, known as Holy Tradition, is founded on the teachings of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and in the evolving life of the community through the Holy Spirit. Many years ago, the apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew traveled to Armenia to tell the people there about Jesus Christ. Since they were among the twelve original apostles chosen by Jesus, they heard the actual words he spoke. They were taught directly by him. Thaddeus and Bartholomew were able to give the people of Armenia a very fresh and accurate understanding of God's Kingdom. The Armenian Church is truly blessed to have this foundation, followed only a few centuries later by the great Illuminator, St. Gregory.

As the centuries passed, Armenia produced many saints and teachers. Our church has used the thoughts and prayers of these holy men and women to develop our beautiful worship services and our church tradition. This tradition keeps us focused on Jesus' message so that we can follow God's word even though many years and many ideas have come and gone. We believe the Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church, as Jesus promised (John 16:13); wise men and women still seek his guidance as Nicodemus sought Jesus.



Did You Know?

The St. Thaddeus Armenian monastery (14th c) at Artaz, in present-day Iran, is recognized as a UNESCO historical site.

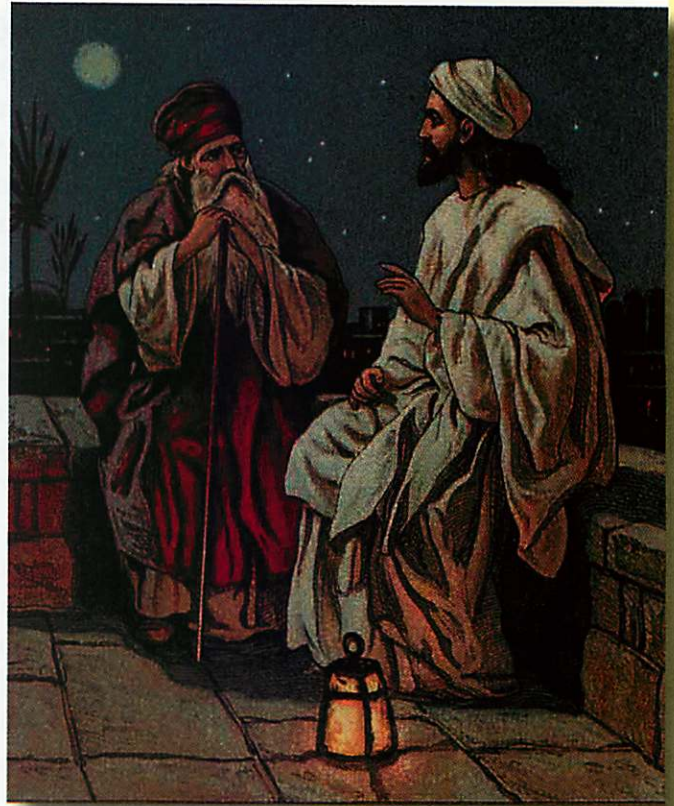


Nicodemus – A Reminder from God

Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews (John 3:1) who lived at the time of Jesus' ministry. He was a member of the Pharisees. The Pharisees were a group of Jews who considered themselves very religious. They strictly followed the Law of Moses from the Old Testament, as well as their own traditions. Most of the Pharisees did not want to listen to Jesus. They had more faith in their own ways and often tried to trick Jesus into saying something wrong.

Nicodemus was very curious about Jesus, so he went to see him under cover of night; he didn't want the other Pharisees to know about the visit. During those precious hours, Jesus explained to Nicodemus the way to enter God's Kingdom (John 3:3-21).

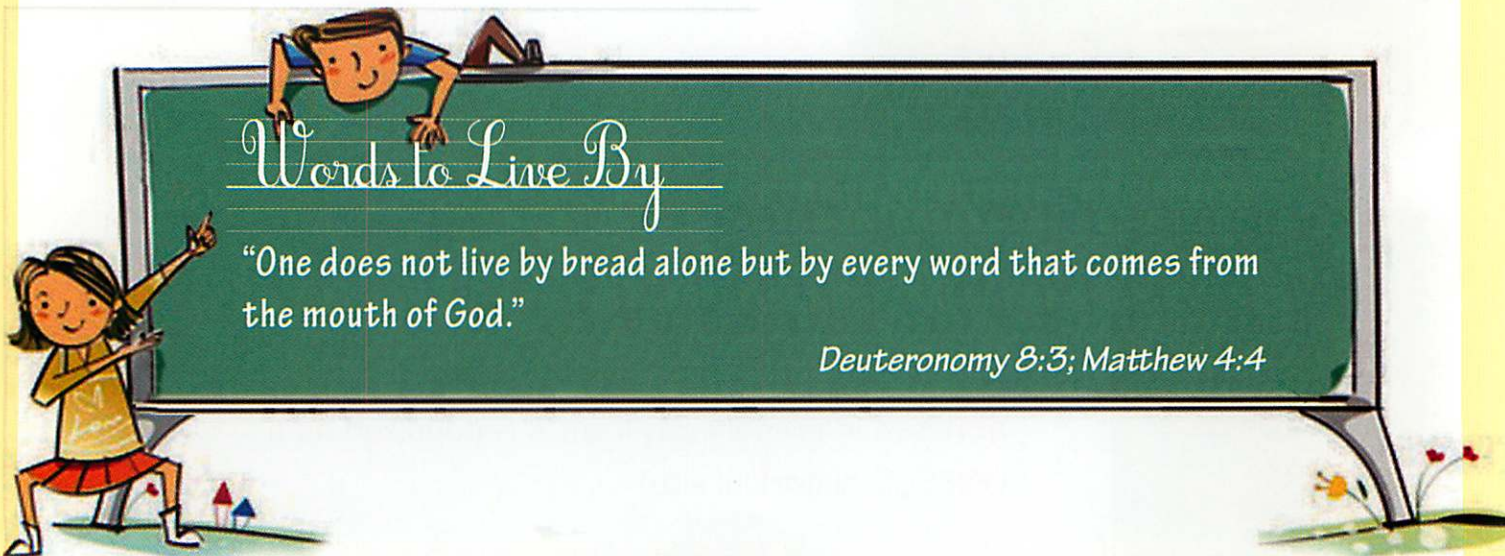
Jesus' words were very different from anything Nicodemus had ever heard. They did not sound the same as the traditions followed by the Jews. He was impressed by what Jesus said, for after the Crucifixion he brought a large quantity of expensive spices to prepare Jesus' body for burial (John 19:39). Nicodemus is a wonderful example of how we *all* might make the effort to learn from Jesus. Let's look at this story together.



John 3:3-21

Discuss these questions as a class:

1. How would you explain being "born again" (verses 5-8)?
2. John 3:16 is a very famous verse. Put it in your own simple words as if you were explaining it to a younger sister or brother.
3. What does verse 19 mean to you? Why is it that people prefer "darkness" to light?



The Right Road

Our world can be a very confusing place. There are so many distractions and so much information, and everyone seems to have an opinion about everything. It is very easy for us to lose track of what's correct and what's important.

This can be true for churches, as well. Since the time of Jesus, they have had to tune out the people who would lead them away from the way he wants us to live. Church customs and practices have developed to help people express deep spiritual truths (lighting candles, crossing ourselves, blessing services, the liturgy). If a church does not have God's Word as its foundation, it can easily lose sight of what is most important about its mission. God wants to make sure we do not follow empty traditions, so he reminds us in many places in the Bible to avoid this.



Below are several passages from Holy Scripture. Check the ones that are examples of God's reminders to make sure that a sincere faith founded on his Word is more important than any other teachings and traditions.

1. "The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men."

Isaiah 29:13 (NIV) _____

2. "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

2 Samuel 12:4 (NIV) _____

3. "And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions."

Mark 7:9 _____

4. "They devoted themselves to apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

Acts 2:42 (NIV) _____

5. "Make tunics, sashes, and headbands for Aaron and his sons, to give them dignity and honor. After you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they may serve as priests."

Exodus 28:40-41 _____



Our Armenian Way

Church art and architecture are part of Holy Tradition.

All over the world, Armenian Church buildings have a distinct look. Instead of the tall, slender steeples we usually see on churches, Armenian churches normally have a sloped dome in the center. That dome is a symbol of heaven which sits above and around the entire created world! It is supported by intersecting arches, rather than columns that block our view. This allows a huge open space in which to worship and pray.

1. Sloped dome
2. Intersecting arches that allow a large open space