Your Lenten Experience

2021

a primer

What is Lent?

The period just before Holy Week is called Lent. It is a time for reflection and self-evaluation. The Church guides the individual believer through this period by offering means of self-discipline and instruction.

When?

Lent begins on the Monday following Poon Paregentan (Day of Great Living) and continues through the Friday before Palm Sunday. This year Great Lent begins on February 15 and ends on March 26, 2021, just before Holy Week.

The Purpose

During the 40-day period of Lent the believer is called to taper life down to the bare essentials. You should ask yourself what is really necessary to live? You'll find that much of life is made up of excesses, which clutter our lives and our values. When tempted in the wilderness, our Lord Jesus reminds us that "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Dietary Restrictions

Part of the Lenten journey involves "giving up" certain foods. In the Armenian Church you are called to abstain from all foods that come from animals. This includes all animal products, including flesh meats, milk & dairy items, eggs, fowl, poultry, fish, etc. – anything that comes from an animal! Find Lenten Recipes! 40 of them at https://tinyurl.com/lent40recipe

Diet is only one small part of the Lent. Jesus instructs us, "It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." (Matthew 15:11)   In this spirit, the individual believer is asked to inspect the content of his or her character and act in charity.

The Most Essential

Certainly, LOVE must be at the focus of your Lenten journey because it is the one ingredient of life that gives meaning and purpose to out existence. Love is the necessity of life that needs to be cultivated and nurtured during Lent so that it becomes the main purpose of existence after the Lenten period. While abstinence and restrictions are one part of Lent, the greater task for the believer is to be in love and harmony with his or her family, friends and nature.

Church Services

Even the physical church in the Armenian Church changes in outward appearance during Lent. The curtain is drawn across the altar to remind us that sin prevents us from truly enjoying God. The prayer *"Havadov Khosdovanim"* (= I Confess with Faith) is offered in particular. St. Nersess Shnorhali, the 12th century Catholicos, wrote this set of 24 prayers and they are considered among the most powerful prayers in the Armenian Church. By following the services, practices and prayer life of the Armenian Church, the believer comes to find the most essential of life's joys. Peace through God is understood and Lent becomes a prelude to true Christian existence.

Lenten Sundays

Each Sunday of Lent has a unique name along with a unique message:

- February 14 – *Poon Paregentan* – A day of good living, to remind us how God wanted us to enjoy life and His blessings. (Read Matt. 5-7)

- February 21 – *Expulsion Sunday* reminds us of how sin enters into our lives and prevents us from experiencing the best of life and God's fullness. (Genesis 1-3)

- February 28 – *Prodigal Sunday* – The story of the Prodigal Son instructs us that no matter how much we stray from the good of life, there is always hope to be one with God. His love is unending and unconditional. (Luke 15:11...)

- March 7 – *Steward Sunday* – God has given us a life full of responsibilities. How do we manage our lives, our families and ourselves? (Luke 16)

- March 14 – *Judge Sunday* – Perseverance and the need to be in constant communion with God is revealed through an unjust and unrighteous judge who is the center of this day's message. (Luke 18)

- March 21 – *Advent* – Christ returns to Earth to judge the living and the dead. How can we be prepared? Listen to the message of his *first* coming! (Matthew 25)

- March 28 – *Palm Sunday* – We enter Holy Week. The triumphant entry into Jerusalem by our Lord also signals the beginning of the holiest days of Christianity. (Matthew 26 & on)