



Eastern Catholic Churches

The Armenian Church of Cilicia

Armenian

The Armenian Church of Cilicia (The Armenian Catholic Church), Liturgical Family: **Antiochene**

1. Cultural Background of Adherents

Countries of origin and history of migration to Australia

According to the NSW Registry, the first arrival of Armenians in Australia was in 1908, when twelve young Armenian Catholics migrated from Aleppo, Syria.

A few Armenians migrated to Australia after the First World War. A second wave of migration occurred after the Second World War when many Armenians arrived in Australia from Indonesia, Java, Singapore, China, India and other countries of the Pacific.

In the 1960s, groups of Armenians began to arrive from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, the Holy Land, Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus, Greece, Turkey, Soviet Armenia, Iran, Ethiopia, Sudan, France and England.

On 27 July 1968, Father Serge Ouzounian arrived in Sydney from Lebanon. He was the first Armenian Catholic priest to land on Australian soil. His task was to 'organise his people'. The Armenian Church community in Australia has grown significantly since that time.

A church at Lidcombe in Sydney was purchased by Mgr Sarkis Ouzounian sometime in October 1978. It was dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption. An Armenian school has also been established at Beaumont Hills in Sydney where instruction is given in Armenian and English. Armenian children attend the school along with Roman Catholic students who live in the area.

In Melbourne, the Armenian Church is dedicated to the Holiest Hearts of Jesus and Mary. It is located in Station Street, Ferntree Gully.

The language of the Liturgy

The liturgical language is Classical Armenian. Classical Armenian is the old Armenian language and is used only during the Divine Liturgy. English is used for the sermon and readings during the Divine Liturgy.

Armenian and French are also used for other parts of the liturgy.



2. Liturgical Seasons

The Season of Advent/Christmas

This is the season of '*Aratchavorats*'. It begins on the Feast of Christ the King. This season lasts for six to eight weeks. It is a time of preparation to receive the Word of God through the birth of Christ. We adore our God and celebrate the Good News, recognising that the Nativity is the beginning of our redemption. There are no particular symbols associated with this season. The emphasis is on teaching that Jesus came to redeem us. There are special songs and canticles sung during the Divine Liturgies.

Families have a Christmas tree in their homes and exchange gifts. These customs have been adopted from the northern European culture and are not traditionally Armenian.

The Vigil of the Divine Liturgy is celebrated on Christmas Eve. Families come to the Divine Liturgy on Christmas Day. Most Armenian families make a kind of bread called '*kata*' which is made from flour and the water from fetta cheese. Sometimes pieces of cheese are mixed in. This bread is blessed at the Church and taken home to be shared.

The Season of the Epiphany and Baptism of Our Lord Jesus Christ

This season, '*Haidnootiun Yev Mugurdootioon*', lasts for three to four weeks and begins with the celebration of the feast of the Epiphany on January 6. On this day, there is a ceremony of the Baptism of Jesus during a very solemn Divine Liturgy.

The Season between Epiphany and Lent

This season, '*Aratchavorats Paregentan*', lasts for two or three weeks. It marks preparation for the season of Lent.

The Season of Lent and Easter

The season of '*Bahots*' (Lent) begins on Ash Monday. On this day blessed olive branches are burnt. The season lasts six weeks. Lent is a time to reflect on the life of Jesus in preparation to receive him in his body and blood and to receive him in our hearts on the Resurrection day. Fasting, mortification, penance and other spiritual virtues, and most of all repentance and reconciliation, are necessary if we are to be worthy of that union. The icons in the church are covered and a curtain is placed around the altar.

Each of the six Sundays of Lent has a particular theme.



1. The First Sunday of Lent commemorates the entering of Adam and Eve into Eden.
2. The expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden is the focus for the Second Sunday.
3. The Third Sunday is known as the Prodigal Son's Sunday.
4. The Fourth Sunday is called the Crafty Steward's Sunday.
5. The Fifth Sunday is the Humble Publican's Sunday (Luke 18:9–14)
6. The Sixth Sunday is entitled the Sevenfold Indictment of the Scribes and Pharisees' Sunday (Matthew 23:13–32).

Fasting starts on the Sunday before Ash Monday and concludes on Palm Sunday. Traditionally the fasting is severe, i.e. no meat, butter, cheese or milk. Vegetables, oil and fish can be eaten. There has been some relaxation of these rules and young families may not adhere strictly.

The week of '*Dzaghgazart*' (Palm Sunday) is just one day of celebration when the church doors are opened. This symbolises the opening of the doors of Heaven. During the ceremony, the veils of the icons and the curtain around the altar are removed. On Palm Sunday, olive and palm branches are used in procession to decorate the church and for blessing.

On the Easter Vigil, people gather in their homes and share egg salads. The symbols of Easter include the lamb, eggs, ears of wheat and grapes. On Easter Sunday, coloured eggs are blessed during or at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy. These eggs have been coloured at home with the family. The eggs, symbolising the Resurrection of Christ, are brought to the church by the families. After the Divine Liturgy, the people process to the parish hall to receive the last blessing, together with the blessing of the hall. This hall blessing symbolises the homes of the families. Later, the priest blesses each family home. In the hall, the people greet one another with, 'Christ has risen from the dead', and respond, 'Blessed be the resurrection of Jesus'. They then kiss one another and exchange Easter greetings and wishes.

The Season of the Resurrection of Our Lord, Jesus Christ

The season, '*Zadig Harootyan Diarn Mero Hisoosi-Cris-Oosi*', lasts seven weeks. During this season the triumph of Jesus Christ is celebrated.

The Season of Pentecost

The season of Pentecost (the coming of the Holy Spirit), '*Pentecoste, Caloosd Hokvooin Serpo*', commemorates the mission of the apostles to announce the Good News. It lasts about seven weeks.

The Season of Transfiguration

The season of the Transfiguration, '*Vartavar*', lasts for three or four weeks.



The Season of the Assumption

The feast occurs on the nearest Sunday to August 15. The Lent of Our Lady begins a week prior to this and includes optional fasting. During the Divine Liturgy of the Feast, grapes are blessed and families take them home to share. The orchards are blessed during the season of the Assumption. This season, known as the Assumption of Our Lady, Virgin Mary, '*Pokhman Surpo Goosin*', lasts three weeks.

The Season of the Holy Cross

The season of '*Soorp Khatch*' begins with the Lent of the Holy Cross in preparation for the solemnity of the Triumph of the Holy Cross. The Lent lasts one week but the season lasts ten weeks. **Ordinary time**

This occurs after each season. It is a quieter time for reflection on the Scripture.

3. Significant Feast Days and Holy Days of Obligation

The following are some of the significant days for Armenian Catholics:

St Gregory Illuminator (Third Saturday after Pentecost)

St Gregory is the patron of the Armenian nation. He converted the king and the Armenian nation to the Christian faith in 310 AD.

Ss Vartan and Martyrs (date depends on Easter)

This day is celebrated on the Thursday before Lent begins. St Vartan was an Armenian General, defender of the Christian faith. He fought against the Mazdaism (the Persian pagan faith) which the Persian king wanted to impose on the people of Armenia. In 451 AD he was martyred with his army but won the freedom of Armenian Christian faith.

The Epiphany

The feast of the Epiphany is celebrated on January 6. It celebrates the Baptism of Jesus. During the Divine Liturgy, the priest chooses a sponsor who holds a cross and then places it in a basin of water, symbolising the Baptism of Jesus. The white dove is another baptismal symbol. Many families gather at parties to celebrate this feast.

The Assumption

The feast of the Assumption is celebrated on the nearest Sunday to 15 August. This feast has been celebrated by Armenians since the fifth century and signifies that the body of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was



transported to Heaven by the angels without corruption. On this day women who are named Mary celebrate their feast day. The feast of the Assumption is celebrated with a solemn Divine Liturgy. The solemn blessing of grapes is carried out during the Divine Liturgy, with special hymns. This commemorates the Last Supper where Jesus consecrated the bread and the wine at the first Divine Liturgy.

The Exaltation of the Holy Cross

The feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross is celebrated on the nearest Sunday to 14 September. This special feast commemorates the triumph of the Holy Cross. It is a very significant feast for the Armenians because of their suffering and persecution. They have a deep affinity with the suffering of Jesus in the hope of sharing his triumph both in this world and in Heaven. In Armenia there are many crosses sculptured on rocks and in churches. These are called '*khatchar*', a word which means 'stone crosses'. A solemn Divine Liturgy is celebrated on this day, with liturgical hymns which express the power of the Holy Cross as a weapon of salvation, a shield against temptations, an altar of immolation, the wood of redemption and salvation, a vehicle to Heaven and a sign of victory.

4. The Reception of Mysteries (Sacraments)

In the Armenian language the word '*Khorhourt*' is used to mean Mystery and Sacrament.

Baptism and Confirmation

According to the Armenian tradition, Baptism and Confirmation are received forty days or more after birth. There is no formal preparation required to receive these sacraments. These sacraments welcome the person to the faith community.

The mother stays at home for forty days after the birth. On the fortieth day, the mother and father bring the child to the door of the church. Here the ceremony and liturgy of the mother's purification are done with the sprinkling of the holy water on her head and that of the child. They then proceed, led by the celebrant, to the altar for the ceremony of presentation. When the purification and presentation ceremony are done, the day of Baptism is decided.

Baptism and Confirmation are received in the same ceremony but the ceremonies are different in substance.

It's different being Armenian because when my class made their Confirmation last year I didn't. I made mine as a baby when I was baptised. (Joseph – Year 7)

Baptism: In keeping with the Presentation of the Lord, the mother presents her child for Baptism. Baptism is by immersion. The symbols of Baptism are a white garment (worn by the infant) which symbolises innocence, and a lit candle which symbolises the living faith in Jesus who said, 'I am the Light.' The lit candle and white garment (before being worn by the child) are blessed. The lit candle is given to the godfather because he is obliged to instruct the child in faith.

Confirmation/Chrismation: In this sacrament the celebrant anoints the infant with chrism. The head is anointed as a symbol of heavenly and divine gifts and graces. The eyes, to symbolise spiritual alertness. The ears, as a symbol of hearing the Commandments of God, whilst the mouth and lips symbolise the fragrance and sweetness of life eternal. The hands are anointed to symbolise charitable works and offerings, whilst the heart is anointed to symbolise the foundation of a holy heart in the baby and a steadfast soul in its body. The kidneys



symbolise strength and a shield against all kinds of evil and the feet symbolise the walk towards life eternal. To mark this special occasion, families gather for a meal and celebration.

Reconciliation

This sacrament is received by the child around 7–8 years of age. The children are usually prepared in the Roman Catholic primary school which they attend. Traditionally, the Armenian Church celebrates the Third Rite of Reconciliation. The emphasis and focus are on helping children to understand forgiveness and on being made whole. The Holy Cross is an important symbol for this sacrament. Families gather for a meal and celebration.

First Communion

This sacrament is also received by the child around 7–8 years of age. Here in Australia, the children are prepared in the Roman Catholic primary school. It is important for them to understand that Holy Communion is the Body of Jesus Christ under the form of bread. The children must be thankful for this privilege, respectful of it and adore it in their hearts. To do this they must understand, at their capacity, the mystery of the breaking of bread. The children generally receive their First Communion with their school. On the following Sunday, they come to the Armenian Church to receive Communion. Families usually gather for a meal and celebration.

Marriage

There is no formal preparation for this sacrament in the Armenian Church. Couples are required to understand the responsibility of marriage and the life commitment ahead. Marriage is a ceremony in its own right. Rings and wine are blessed. The blessed wine is offered to the bride and bridegroom, symbolising the unity they now share. Family and friends then gather to celebrate.

Holy Orders

This sacrament is usually received around 25 years-of-age. In Australia, candidates attend Roman Catholic seminaries but remain within their Armenian Church. The candidates must understand the responsibility of priesthood and be devoted to offering and sacrifice. During their formation, candidates deepen their understanding of being called to serve, not to be served. The ordination takes place during the Divine Liturgy where the main celebrant places his hands on the candidate. During the ceremony the candidate asks the congregation whether or not they believe he is worthy of ordination. The congregation answer 'Yes'. After the ordination, those present kiss the hands of the newly ordained priest and ask for his blessing. Family and friends gather to celebrate with a special meal.



The Armenian priests do not marry. However, in some exceptional circumstances, marriage is permitted. There are married Armenian priests in Egypt.

Anointing of the Sick

This sacrament is administered when people invite the priest to come and anoint an individual who is unwell. There is no formal preparation required. The focus within the mystery is on the healing of spirit and body. During this ceremony the hands, heart, head and kidneys are anointed with oil. Prayers of Absolution are said and Holy Communion is given. The family gather together when the individual is being anointed.

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