

Lesson 4

Feasts of the Cross



Pray Together

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

Jesus, you taught us so much.

You taught us how to love through our sacrifice.

You showed us the straightest path to the Father

Through the love for him and our neighbor.

May we have the strength to follow your example and your path,

So that we may be worthy to be chosen by you,

When you return as our king and our judge.

My Lenten Journal

Quick Quiz

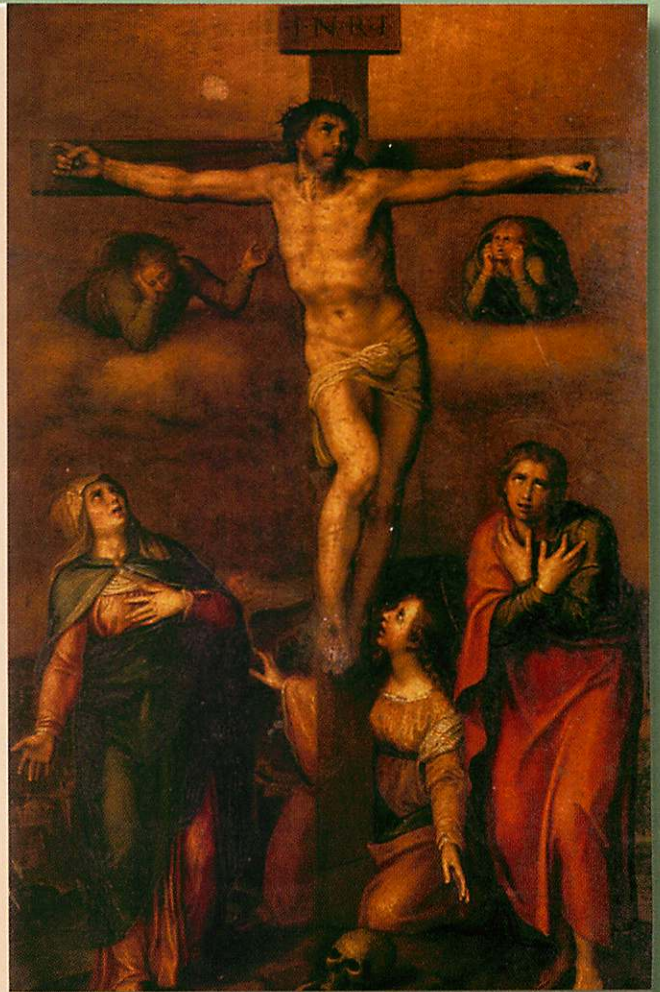
True or False

- The Virgin Mary was the first person to notice the empty tomb on Easter morning.
- The disciples began to understand that Jesus was the Son of God after he defeated death at his Resurrection.
- Christmas, Pentecost, and all other church feasts would not be meaningful without the Resurrection.
- Daniel, whose experiences prefigured those of Jesus, was also a famous poet.
- Some Armenians tie knots in a string during the Vigil Service on Palm Sunday.

Our Symbol of Victory

Execution on a cross was something to be avoided at all costs. It was an extremely barbaric way to put someone to death. In addition, crucifixions were public, so all who passed by could ridicule the victim. It was considered the most shameful way to die.

So why did Jesus, God and perfect human being, endure such suffering and humiliation? As the Lamb of God, Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice and sin-bearer. He took the punishment for every sin of every one of his people, past, present, and future. Such a huge burden of sin calls for a huge punishment. It required nothing less than God himself suffering death and enduring hell. When Jesus lay still in the tomb, he was not merely resting up for Easter. In those hours his holy nature suffered all that we would face in hell if he didn't take our place. What greater love is there? John 15:13 states "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." When Jesus was raised on the third day, the cross took on a new meaning. It became a sign of the defeat of death and our victory over sin through him. When we see a cross, we feel gratitude. We appreciate what Jesus endured for us, and we celebrate the love that motivated him to offer himself in our place.



Friends of Jesus

After such a demonstration of God's love for us, we realize we can never repay the debt we owe him. We can, however, model his attitude of service and sacrifice. Luke 9:23 states "Then he said to them all: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'" This doesn't mean we literally walk around carrying a cross, but that each day we make it a point to help and serve others in his name.

1. What are some of the things we have that we can share with others?
2. How will God help us with these efforts?
3. How can our words be a reflection of Christ's love?
4. What are some of the issues you think could be helped by Christian action?
5. Read Matthew 6:1-2. When you help others, how does God want you to act about your good works?

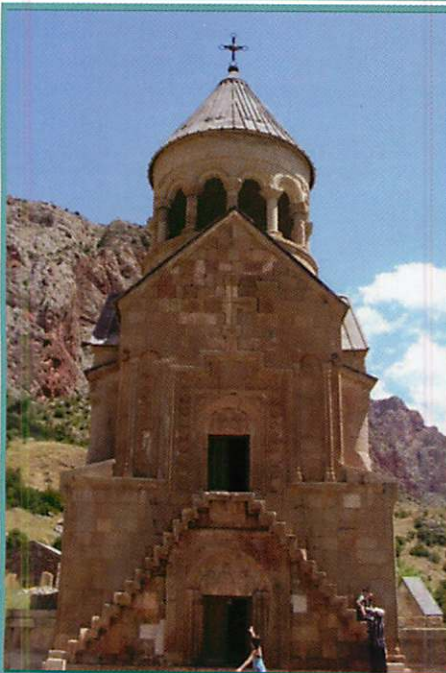
Exaltation of the Cross

The gold, jewel-encrusted crosses we see in church remind us of the glory of Jesus' triumph over sin and the grave. Instead of shame and death, now when we see a cross we think of its role in helping us reach God's kingdom. We rest in the peace of our relationship as members of his family.

Years after the Crucifixion, fragments of the Holy Cross were given to various churches, including ours. The major part of the cross remained in Jerusalem, at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, until wars caused possession to go back and forth. Today, we venerate this holy object and all its meaning with the

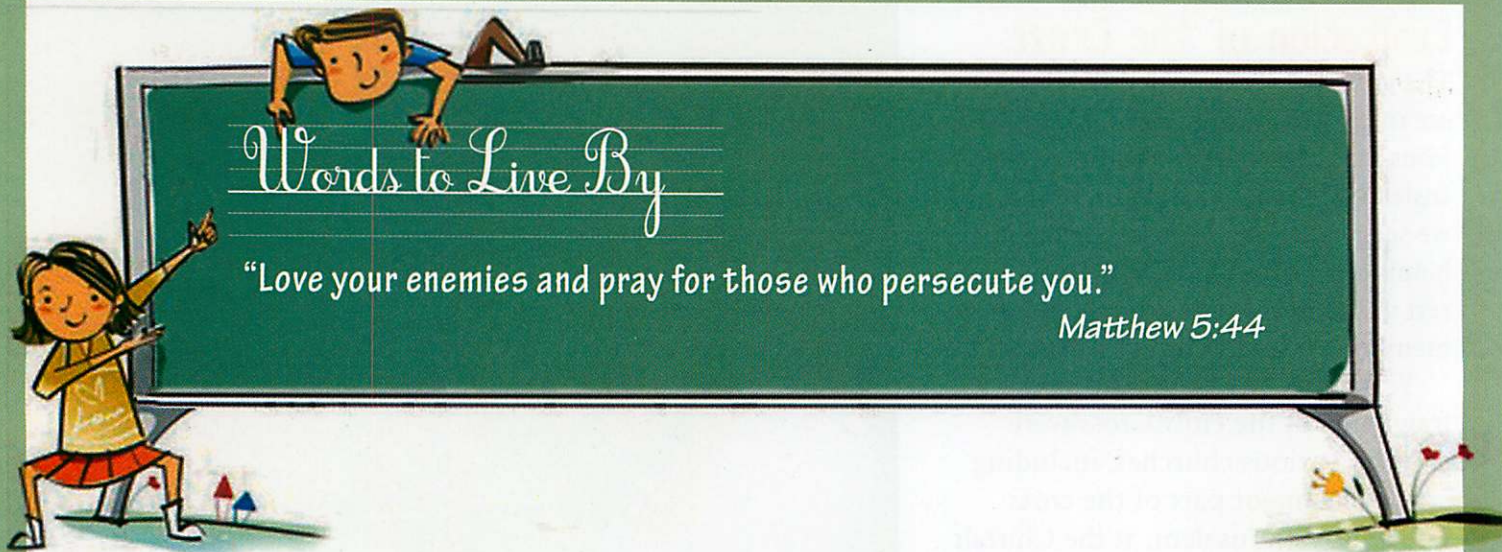
Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, or "Khachveratz." This feast occurs on the Sunday nearest September 14, and recalls an interesting historical event. The Persians had captured the cross of Christ when they conquered Jerusalem. In the 7th century, a coalition of forces (which included Armenians) led by the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius marched on Jerusalem, seized the cross, and passed through Armenia where it was lifted up and venerated by the crowds that gathered on the way. An extraordinary moment! The feast day takes place at the same time as the harvest and Armenians take this opportunity to give God the credit for a bountiful harvest. We thank him for blessing our fields and farms.

During Khachveratz there is a procession with the cross in the church. We decorate the cross with sweet basil, which has a wonderful fragrance and is used in many foods. The faithful bring home a piece of the basil, which is said to relieve pain, as Christ's death on the cross and his Resurrection relieve us of the pain and sorrow of sin.



Did You Know?

The Armenian people's love of Jesus has led to many traditions and legends about the cross. One of these happened long ago, when villagers would wash the cross of the local monastery and save the water they used. They would then feed the water to their animals or pour it on them to keep them healthy.



Our Armenian Way

There are other famous feasts of the cross. One that is specific to the Armenian Church is called "The Holy Cross of Varak."

In the seventh century, Armenia had suffered terribly in the wars between Persia and Byzantium. Many Armenians had died in the conflicts, and homes, fields, and livestock had been destroyed.

One night during this trying time, in about 653 AD, a hermit named Todik noticed a light in the shape of a cross in the night sky. Bright as the sun, the light graced the Varak Mountains of Van. Todik and his student Hovel followed the

miraculous light, which eventually rested over the monastery at Varak. Entering the chapel there, Todik and Hovel discovered a fragment of a cross that had been left there long ago by St. Hripsime.

The light stayed for twelve days. This gave thousands of the faithful an opportunity to see the miracle. Catholicos Nersess III was so overcome with joy at the sight that he proclaimed a week of prayer and fasting, and he composed the hymn "Through the Sign of Your All-Conquering Cross." The cross-shaped light lifted the spirits of the people of the battered Armenian nation and encouraged them in their difficult times. They knew God was thinking of them and would not desert them, as we know he will never leave us, either.