

THE SACRAMENTS OF BAPTISM AND CONFIRMATION

WHAT IS A SACRAMENT?

A Sacrament in the Armenian Church is the vehicle to distribute the gifts of God through His Holy Spirit. There are seven Sacraments in the Armenian Church as the “visible” moving forces and the “life-giving” sustainers of the members of the church. All seven are established by Christ himself. They are not just rites and ceremonies; they are the “actions” of Christ performed by the authorized members of the clergy. No Sacrament can be performed outside the church, anywhere else, since it is holy and is the action of Christ himself. Under circumstances where there is no Armenian Church edifice, a sister church in the neighborhood may be used.

ARE SACRAMENTS ESSENTIAL?

A church without Sacraments is not considered as “functional” because they are integrated in the life of the Christian faithful all along, from his birth to his death, even though some may argue that the church firmly believes primarily in the Holy Bible and preaches the Word of God as a priority, deeming Sacraments unnecessary. For that matter, however, the Sacraments are certainly the offsprings of the Word of God and have reached us as the ordinances of the Bible, directly mandated by our Savior Jesus Christ.

Baptism or Christening is the initial Sacrament of the church, following the Baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan by John the Baptist. As a canonical rule infants are baptized in the Armenian Church as in the Catholic and Orthodox churches. They are confirmed immediately after with the Holy Oil (Muron). This of course does not mean that adults are denied Baptism. They are called by the church not to delay any further and live in a state out of communion with the church, but return and receive the Sacrament of Baptism as soon as possible. With Baptism the recipient enters the church as the “adopted child of the Father and the co-heir of Christ” and lives in full communion with the Christian faith. No further Sacraments can be administered on any person who has not been baptized and confirmed in the first place.

HOW IS BAPTISM PERFORMED?

It is performed by an ordained priest who blesses the water in the already consecrated font built in the northern side of the church, pours drops of the Holy Muron in it and bathes the child in the water in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, giving his/her name for the first time. Baptism is a complete washing of the infant, symbolically cleansing it from the original sin and making it a full-fledged member of the Christian Church.

Beside the officiating priest, the water and the Holy Oil, it is mandatory that a Godfather, along with the parents of the child, be present. The attendance of relatives and friends will complete the participation of the church in this Holy Sacrament. No Sacrament in the Armenian Church is performed privately, by the priest alone. Witnesses are necessary to make any Sacrament valid and canonical.

THE GODFATHER'S DUTY

The Godfather is usually a member of the family who must be a baptized member of the Armenian Church, knowledgeable and responsible regarding the Armenian faith and basic teachings, since it is his obligation to follow up with the upbringing of the child in the Armenian Church. The Godfather's task does not end at the conclusion of the ceremony; it actually begins if taken his responsibility seriously. His participation is active and canonical.

WHAT IS THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION?

Confirmation follows immediately, as the newly-baptized child of God is anointed by the Holy Oil on the different parts of his body: forehead, eyes, ears, mouth, nose, palms, heart, the back and the feet. Each ointment done with the sign of the cross is pronounced with a statement asking Christ's spiritual gifts bestowed through the entire life of the child. Confirmation has come into the life of the church from the Lord's Baptism in the river, where a dove appeared on Jesus as the sign of the Holy Spirit and his divine gifts. Also, at Pentecost when the Apostles received the Holy Spirit as promised by the Lord, likewise the church confirms the child, considering the Holy Oil as the carrier of divine gifts poured down by the Holy Spirit. This Sacrament marks a "new Pentecost".

Now the child baptized and confirmed is ready to be presented to the Holy Altar to offer his/her first worship and then to receive the first communion. This way the newly-born has already received three Sacraments, one after the other, thus bringing the child in full communion with the Christian faith and the Armenian Apostolic Church.

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