

RAISING SAINTS

CHILDREN + FAMILY MINISTRY // WEEKLY GUIDE FOR TEACHERS + PARENTS

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTERTIDE - SECOND PALM SUNDAY

May 17th is the Seventh Sunday of Eastertide. It is also known as Second Palm Sunday. It is named as such because of two reasons.

- The first is linked to the assigned scripture readings. In the Armenian Church after the Feast of the Resurrection a daily passage from all four gospels is read. Thus, until the Feast of Pentecost all four gospels are read in their entirety. The passages which are read on the Seventh Sunday of Eastertide happen to be describing Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem when he was greeted with "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" Hence, the descriptive name of Second Palm Sunday is given.
- The second reason is a legend from our Armenian Church history. We know that St. Gregory the Enlightener refused to worship the pagan gods ordered by King Tirdat. As a result, the king had him imprisoned in a deep dungeon. Gregory remained in that dungeon for thirteen years surrounded by snakes and scorpions, exposed to many dangers. His only source of light was a small opening at the top of the dungeon. Legend tells us that an angel from heaven visited him daily, bringing solace and encouragement to endure his sufferings. During her visits Gregory's dark dungeon was transformed into luminous

heaven. The angel in essence made God present to Gregory. One day, on the fourth day after the Feast of the Ascension, the angel did not come. When she returned the next day Gregory asked the reason for her absence. The angel explained, "Each year the nine ranks of angels celebrate and glorify the triumphant entry of Jesus Christ into heaven. This celebration lasts for nine days, each day assigned to one of the nine ranks of angels. Since I belong to the fourth rank, I needed to be with my group and celebrate Christ's entry into heaven on the fourth day."

This legend successfully turns our attention to the true meaning of the Lord's Ascension into heaven. It is not merely an event, but the fulfillment of Jesus Christ's mission for the salvation of the world. Christ's victory over death through his cross shines for us the bright light of eternal joy with him. St. Gregory was able to endure the torturous environment of the dungeon through prayer and the visitation of God's guardian angel. As a result, he was able to fulfill God's will and plan for his life and mission. St. Gregory became a witness to God's saving power when he was called to heal the ailing king Tirdat, who finally granted freedom to Christian Armenians to worship God freely.

In the twenty-first century the persecution of Christians has taken on different forms and often is so subtle that we cannot even identify it easily. The

social norms of a society which offer all sorts of worldly pleasures, often void of values, truly challenges our young and old. We need to ask ourselves, “How do we see or experience the luminous presence of God in the midst of the dark forces which endanger our connection to God, the source of our life? How can we help our young generation to resist the temptations of the world which bombard them daily? What positive models must we hold up to them in order to help them in making choices which are Christ centered?”

The model of our great St. Gregory the Enlightener is a source of comfort and inspiration. St. Gregory’s unwavering trust in God and his total commitment to be Christ’s disciple not only saved him from the dangers

of the dungeon, but he helped to lead the Armenian people to the same loving care of Jesus Christ our Lord. Let this legend ring in the ears of our young ones so that they may endure the difficult challenges of their lives in the 17th century.

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Note: The material for the children will be presented in three levels in order to make it age appropriate:

- Level 1: Ages 5-8 (K-3rd grades)
- Level 2: Ages 9-12 (4-7th grades)
- Level 3: Ages 13-17 (8-12th grades)



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