

The Church of Armenia: the Obligations of Worship

by Archbishop Malachias Ormanian

Abstinence days are many in the Armenian calendar. In the first place, two days in the week, Wednesday and Friday, are devoted to abstinence. The Paschal abstinence is observed for forty-eight consecutive days, from Shrove-Monday to Holy Saturday. In addition, there are ten weeks of abstinence in the year, or nearly a week in a month; each week embracing a period of five or six days. On these occasions only nourishment of a vegetable kind is permitted, for everything which belongs to the animal kingdom is regarded as meat diet; honey is the only exception. Milk diet and fish are allowed only on the eve of the five great festivals [i.e., 1. Easter-Pascha, 2. Nativity/Theophany, 3. Transfiguration, 4. Exaltation of the Cross, 5. Assumption of the Mother of God], and after the mass of the day.

A prescribed dispensation from abstinence is allowed during the forty days following Easter, and during the octave of Theophany. Altogether there may be reckoned to be a total of a hundred and sixty days of abstinence during the year.

The fast, in addition to abstinence, is prescribed only in Lent, during the five days of the week, from Monday to Friday, and in the week of the Aratchavor. Nowadays, the fast -that is, abstinence from all food- is kept from early morning until midday; formerly it lasted until vespers. Notwithstanding the fervent zeal displayed by the Church and the faithful Armenians in holding to this custom, which is taken as a matter of devotion, its observance is looked upon, nevertheless, as an external law, that is, one of supererogation.” (p. 178-9)