

# *The Rite of Christian Burial of the Armenian Orthodox Church*

God's mercy is infinite and His goodness is beyond measure. This is what our Holy Church has always maintained, and thus believes and hopes that the loving Lord will be merciful even to the deceased.

From the earliest of Christian times, psalms and hymns were sung to our life-giving God when a believer died. But the basic parts of the Funeral Service in use today can be traced mainly to the fifth century. With the passage of time the Service has been enriched with psalms and hymns so that it has become one of the most versatile, dramatic and impassionate services of our Church.

The Rite of Christian Burial of the Armenian Church is an example of a healthy understanding of the true nature of life and death. The Service accomplishes the following: a) utilizes the occasion of death to help us develop a more profound understanding of the meaning and purpose of life; b) helps us to deal with the emotions we have at the time of death and as time passes after the death; c) emphasizes the fact that death for the Christian is not the end, and affirms our hope in salvation and eternal life; d) recognizes the existence of the emotions of grief caused by the separation from a loved one, and encourages their expression

In the readings, prayers, and hymns of the Funeral Service a dramatic dialogue takes place between the faithful and God, and even the deceased and God. The Service acknowledges the reality of human existence - the frailty of life and the vanity of worldly things - and directs our minds and hearts to contemplate the incomparable value of the eternal blessings of God's kingdom. At the same time with a contrite spirit, the priests and people invoke the infinite mercy of the Almighty God for the departed.

Anyone who attentively follows the hymns and prayers of the Funeral Service will be edified and consoled in many ways. The service is not only an opportunity to express our love for our loved one who has fallen asleep; it is also a sacred time, an opportunity for reflection and inner meditation on our own relationship with God and on the orientation of our lives.

When we reflect on the sublime thoughts of the Funeral Service our souls becomes contrite, our hearts are softened, and we pray fervently for the forgiveness and the repose of the person who has been transferred to the life beyond the grave. Thus we who are still alive are beckoned to live the rest of our lives in repentance and in full dedication to Christ.

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