

PEOPLE WHO HAVE SHAPED OUR CHURCH AND NATION

We owe our Armenian Christian culture, heritage and identity individually and collectively to the courage and creativity of our forebears. Below are short biographies of 40 key figures who championed our church, culture and nation, cultivating the resilience which has sustained us through many difficult times. Their stewardship of our faith, land and people is an inspiration for us all to use our God-given talents and resources for the service of God and nation.

NATIONAL FIGURES

1. **Artashes I** (189-160 BC) the founder of Artashesian dynasty, was a great diplomat of his time. Taking advantage of the war between Rome and the remnants of Alexander the Great's Empire, he succeeded in unifying the Armenian lands and people into one Armenian-speaking state. He laid the foundation of a powerful Armenia. He made cultural and economical reforms, created a strong army of over 100,000. On the Ararat plain, he built Artashat, which became the capital of Armenia.
2. **Tigran the Great** (95-55 BC) ruler of the largest Armenian state. He unified Armenia, from the Mediterranean to the Black to the Caspian Seas, raising awareness of Armenian culture among neighboring peoples and in the Roman Empire. He is remembered as a tolerant king, who ruled all peoples fairly.
3. **St. Grigor (Gregory the Illuminator)**, patron Saint of the Armenian people (see Saints)
4. **St. Trdat** (see Saints)
5. **St. Movses Khorenatsi** (see Saints)
6. **St. Vartan Mamikonian** (see Saints)
7. **Ashot II (Yerkat) Bagratuni** (914-928) builds on the momentum of his grandfather, Ashot I, who reestablished Armenian independence after 200 years of Arab rule and founded the Armenian Kingdom, whose capital Ani was founded by Ashot III the Merciful (953-977). Ani, known as the city of a thousand churches, grew into one of largest cities in the Eastern Mediterranean (population over 100,000). See <http://www.virtualani.org/>
8. **Ruben I** (ruled 1080-1095) was the founder of Armenian Cilician state (1080) and Rubinian dynasty (1080-1226), consolidated by King Levon II in 1198. Founding a new state on the Mediterranean when much of the Armenian homeland was besieged by the invading Turks from Central Asia, he demonstrated courage and fortitude, securing for his people a chance to live in freedom and independence.

9. **Hetum I** (ruled 1226-1270), King of the Cilician Armenian Kingdom and founder of Hetumian dynasty. Successor to the Rubinian legacy, he was a great diplomat of his time, balancing the European Crusaders with a policy of alliance and friendship with the Mongol leaders from Central Asia.
10. **Mkhitar Gosh** (1120-1213), Armenian legal scholar, fable-writer, teacher and political adviser. Mkhitar Gosh ("the beardless") was born in northern Artsakh in the city of Gandzak. He studied in Cilicia, then returned to Artsakh. Mkhitar Gosh was a sought-after political adviser and the compiler of a ground-breaking Law Code, which continued to be used into the 19th century. He also wrote a collection of 190 fables, available online at <http://rbedrosian.com/goshint.htm>.
11. **Israel Ori** (1659 -1711) leader of national liberation. After centuries of neglect, Israel Ori brought Armenia's independence to the attention of international powers. He rose to the rank of colonel in the Russian Army. He was a man who put ideas into practice, making the transition from merchant to patriot; an example of the role of influential individuals in Armenia's modern development.
12. **Davit Bek** (?-1728) leader of national liberation. Working in southern Armenia in the region of Syunik, from 1722 to 1725, Davit Bek, with the support of Mkhitar Sparapet, led the Armenians of Artsakh and Zangezur in civilian self-defense against Persian and Ottoman oppression. Through his efforts, the Armenian villagers from Kapan to Meghri were able to live in relative peace and security.
13. **Khrimian Hayrig (1820 -1907). Catholicos, Patriarch of Constantinople.** A beloved son of the Armenian nation, poet, newspaper editor, political and religious leader. Born in Van, Khrimian Hayrig was abbot of Varag Monastery, Prelate of Moush, and later Patriarch of Constantinople. Upon returning from deliberations on the Armenian Question in the Congress of Berlin (1878) where he sought protection for the Armenians from Ottoman oppression, he gave his famous "iron ladle" sermon, on Armenians' right to self-defense. Exiled by the Ottoman Government, by popular demand he was unanimously elected Catholicos of All Armenians (1892-1907). He established the Diocese of the Armenian Church in the United States. For his compassionate solidarity and devoted care for their well-being and enlightenment, the people called him Hayrig (father).

MUSICIANS AND ARTISTS

1. **Komitas Catholicos (Aghtsetsi) (musician, builder)** Catholicos of All Armenians (615-628). He attended the Council of Ctesiphon organized by the Persians, where he presented the Epistle of Faith of the Armenian Church, rejecting both the Council of Chalcedon and Nestorianism and affirming the authentic apostolic teaching of the Armenian Church. He built many churches and monasteries, including the reconstruction of Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin and St. Hripsimé Monastery, earning him the name Komitas Shinogh (Komitas the Builder). Like his 20th century namesake, Komitas Vardapet, Catholicos Komitas was a gifted musician, composing many hymns still used in the Armenian Church.

2. **St. Gregory of Narek (Grigor Narekatsi), musician writer, theologian (see Saints)**
3. **St. Nerses Shnorhali, Catholicos of All Armenians, musician, writer, theologian, statesman (see Saints)**
4. **Trdat the Architect (950-1020)** chief architect of the Bagratuni Dynasty of Armenia. In 961, Ashot III the Merciful (see his bio above under National Figures) moved his capital from Kars to the great city of Ani. The Catholicate moved to Ani as well and was established in the magnificent, cross-shaped, domed Mother Cathedral of Ani built by Trdat the Architect. Trdat was so internationally renowned for his mastery of vault and dome design and construction that he was summoned to the capital of Byzantium to supervise the repairs of the main cathedral, Hagia Sophia, which had been damaged by the earthquake of 989. Some attribute the dome of St. Mark Church at the UNESCO World Heritage Site in Haghpat Monastery to Trdat.
5. **Toros Roslin (1216-1288)** (painter, manuscript illuminator), the greatest of medieval Armenian manuscript painters, working at the height of the Cilician Kingdom of Armenia. His use of perspective and naturalistic elements added to the spiritual impact of his work. Prolific as well as exceptionally talented, he brought a new quality to Armenian illuminated manuscripts and a new spirituality to this medium, blazing a path that many talented Armenian artists would follow.
6. **Sayat Nova (1712-1795)** (musician) Sayat Nova is one of best known and prolific Armenian musicians. Probably born in Sanahin, he grew up near Tbilisi, Georgia. He wrote poetry, sang and played the *kamanche*. He performed in the court Heraclius of Georgia, where as a diplomat, he helped forge an alliance between Georgia, Armenia and the Tatars against the Persian Empire. He lost his position when he fell in love with the king's daughter, and spent the rest of his life as an itinerant bard (*ashough*). In 1795 he was killed in Haghpat Monastery by the army of Agha Mohammed Khan. Known to have written at least 220 songs and believed to have written hundreds more, Sayat-Nova is considered by many the greatest folk singer-songwriter of the Caucasus. Sayat-Nova's life is the subject of *The Color of Pomegranates* by the renowned Armenian Film Director Sergey Paradjanov.
7. **Hovhannes Ayvazovsky (1817-1900)** (painter). The son of an Armenian merchant, Hovhannes Ayvazovsky never forgot his roots in the Armenian people and Christian culture. Throughout the devastating period of Armenian massacres in the Ottoman Empire, he helped village after village to pick up the pieces with the proceeds from his art. Ayvazovsky attended the Academy of Arts in Petersburg. He is best known for his seascapes. "The sea is my life," Ayvazovsky wrote; it is a symbol for the stormy journey each person makes through life.
8. **Martiros Saryan (1880-1972)** (painter) captured the rich earthen colors of the Armenian landscape under the powerful Armenian sun. Like the works of Paul Gauguin and Henri Matisse, he tried to portray the primitive power of nature in his bold colors and shapes. Saryan was strongly tied to the land and people of Armenia. In 1915 he went to Etchmiadzin to help refugees who had fled from the

Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire. He also designed the coat of arms for Armenian SSR. Undeterred by the Soviet repression in the 1930s he devoted himself to presenting the country he loved to the world, and today we see Armenia through his eyes. He died in Yerevan on May 5, 1972.

9. **Arshile Gorky (Vostanik Manoog Adoyan)** (1904-1948) (painter), a genocide survivor, born in Van, Arshile Gorky found his way to the United States at the age of 16. His mother was not so fortunate, and the pain of her death was a symbol of the tragic turmoil of the Genocide, evident in many of Gorky's works. While attending the Rhode Island School of Design, he adopted the last name of Russian writer, Maxim Gorky. His style is reminiscent of Miro, Cézanne, and Picasso, but it evolved into his own unique blend of biomorphism, cubism and Surrealism. At the end of his career, Gorky was a recognized pioneer of the Abstract Expressionist movement, with many public works from the depression era, such as the fresco in the Newark International Airport.
10. **Komitas Vardapet** (1869-1935) (churchman, musician), (Soghomon Soghomonian), founder of Armenian classical music, who single handedly saved much of Armenian folk and sacred music from obliteration in the Genocide. As a young boy with a good voice who sang folk and church music, he was taken to Etchamidzin. There, with Khrimian Hayrig's encouragement, he worked tirelessly at collecting, notating and arranging Armenian music and organizing choirs and concerts, determined to save as much as he could of an endangered culture. Trained in Germany, he created his own style of Armenian polyphony, which is now a staple of Armenian Church music. His polyphonic rendering of the Armenian Divine Liturgy is one of the two basic settings in use in Armenian churches world-wide.
11. **Aram Khachaturian** (1903-1978), is the best known Armenian classical composer. Born in Tiflis in the waning years of the Russian Empire, Khachaturian is known for his national style of classical music, capturing the vigor of Armenian folk music to forge an unforgettably melodic, rhythmic sound. Staples of the world-wide classical repertoire, Khachaturian's best known works are *Spartak* (Spartacus) and *Gayané*, the latter featuring the now ubiquitous *Sabre Dance*. Like Rimsky-Korsakov in Russia, Bartok in Hungary, or Grieg in Norway, he was a master of classical form who had a genuine feel for the sound and rhythms of his native culture.
12. **Alan Hovhaness** (1911-2000), a prolific 20th Century American composer, pioneer of East-West fusion, mixing Armenian and other Eastern themes into his music. Rejecting popular modern trends, he was a renovator of archaic forms and modes and an innovator in random polyphony (*ad lib* counterpoint). His use of the Armenian pedal tone with chant-like melodies was inspired by Armenian church music (he was organist in St. James Armenian Church in Watertown, MA in the early 1940's). Later in his productive career (he wrote more than 500 works, including operas and symphonies), he became a proponent of minimalism, "Simplicity is beauty."

LITERARY FIGURES

An Armenian poet once wrote that the Armenian language is the home of the Armenians. Indeed, since 5000 BC when the Armenians were among the first to put the stamp of their identity on their own version of the common Indo-European language, Armenians have created a world of words within which to express their creative energies. Starting with Sts. Sahag and Mesrob, the Armenian literary language made possible a culture of the word, mind and story that has sustained the Armenian people through the centuries.

1. **St. Mesrob**, inventor of the Armenian Alphabet, and St. Sahag (see Saints)
2. **St. Movses Khorenatsi**, father of Armenian history (see Saints)
3. **St. Gregory of Narek**, author of the Armenian Prayerbook, *Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart* (see Saints)
4. **St. Nerses Shnorhali**, poet, hymnography, creator of the modern *Book of Hours* (see Saints)
5. **David of Sassoon**, the Armenian national epic, based on an oral tradition spanning centuries, took shape in the 10th century, during one of the peaceful lulls in Armenian history when the nation's creative spirit was expressed in the building of the city of 1000 churches, Ani, and the carved Monastery of Aghtamar, and the Prayerbook of St. Gregory of Narek. The name "David" comes from the Hebrew for "the beloved one." Like the Old Testament David who slew Goliath, David of Sassoon is the beloved, national hero, the defiant and self-reliant youth, who by the grace of God defends his homeland in an unequal duel against a titanic oppressor. The epic spans four generations of the house of Sassoon, a mountainous enclave of the Armenian highlands, west of Lake Van and Mt. Ararat, known for its hearty folk and indomitable spirit. The earliest written reports of the epic were made by Portuguese travelers in the 16th century. The basic text of the epic was first recorded in 1873 by Fr. Karekin Srvantsdyants, who worked closely with Khrimian Hayrig (see his biography above). The full epic is a hefty tome that, one can imagine, took medieval tellers days to recite, easing the boredom of the long, lonely winters for the highland shepherds. One of the world's great national epics, it has been translated and retold in many languages. For Toumanian's verse rendition in Armenian and English, see the Literature section of www.arak29.am.
6. **Khachatur Abovyan** (1809-1848) Armenian writer and public figure, author of *Wounds of Armenia (Verk Hayastani)*, which celebrates Armenia's liberation from the Ottomans and Persians. Because of its deeply patriotic themes it enjoyed great popularity. It was a ground-breaking work, the first major novel in the modern Armenian language, at a time when most literature was still written in a more conservative form of adapted Classical Armenian. He also translated the works of Homer and Schiller into Armenian. He mysteriously disappeared in 1848.

7. **Mikayel Nalbandian** (1829-1866) poet and patriot. Author of the poem that inspired Armenia's national anthem, *Mer Hayrenik*, Mikayel Nalbandian was a towering figure, extolling the themes of national reform and renewal. He was influenced and in turn influenced many of the writers and publicists of his time. A writer and national leader, his advocacy on behalf of the Armenian people led to his arrest and imprisonment in St. Petersburg by the Tsarist government in 1862. Having been accused of inciting anti-Tsarist sentiments with the distribution of 'propagandistic' literature, he was eventually exiled (in 1885) to Siberia, where a year later he died of tuberculosis in prison.
8. **Daniel Varoujan** (1884-1915) poet. A victim of the Armenian Genocide, Varoujan was an extraordinarily gifted poet of village life. His depiction of the ethos of Armenian life is breathtakingly beautiful. In 1914, Daniel Varoujan established the "Mehian" literary group and magazine with Gosdan Zarian, Hagop Oshagan, Aharon and Kegham Parseghian. The movement aimed to inspire the Armenian people, exhausted from centuries of brutality and oppression through historical consciousness. At the age of 31, when he was blossoming to become a poet of international stature, he was brutally murdered by the Young Turks at the start of the Armenian Genocide in 1915.
9. **Bedros Tourian** (1851-1872) poet, playwright and actor. A romantic poet, he left a rich legacy in his tragically short life. His historical plays were inspired by a yearning for national liberation. Knowing that he would die young, he lived the highs and lows of emotion, complaining to the Almighty in one poem and beseeching forgiveness in another. He died of tuberculosis at the tender age of 21.
10. **Raffi (Hakob Melik-Hakobian)** (1835-1888) novelist and poet. Raffi was a seminal novelist, often called the founder of the Armenian historical novel. Originally from Iran, he made his debut as a writer in Tiflis, away from his native land, joining the literary school of Mshak, which was an Armenian journal founded by Grigor Artsruni in 1872. This publication under the leadership of its founder and editor played an important role in inspiring enlightenment and causing the awakening of the Armenian people.
11. **Hovhannes Toumanian** (1869-1923) writer of poems, short stories, fairy tales. Toumanian wrote fairy tales such as *Kach-Nazar*, *David of Sassoon*, *Parvana*, and *Anoush*. The latter was adapted into a popular opera, still gracing the Armenian stage. *Anoush*, considered Toumanian's masterpiece, expresses the author's ideas about man's existence, environment and human passions. Toumanian lived during the Armenian Genocide. He sponsored several endeavors to help war victims, orphans and refugees. The theme of his work was to attempt to emulate harmony. Poet Avetik Isahakian has said of Toumanian, "His talent and role in the Armenian poetry is like a mountain stream which gives travelers new powers and fresh breath."
12. **Hagop Baronian** (1842-1891) playwright, satirist. Widely acknowledged as the greatest Armenian satirist, playwright Hagop Baronian was also a writer, educator, and social figure. Baronian's most famous work *Medzabadiv Mouratsganner* ("Honorable Beggars"), parodies the almost beggar-like state of writers and

publishers in that period. The sarcastic criticism in his writings stirred laughter, but also rebuked the loose life of the leading figures in the Armenian social circles of Constantinople. Unfortunately, he suffered the same fate as the characters in *Medzabadiv Mouratsganner* and ended up dying penniless on the streets of Istanbul.

13. **Krikor Zohrab** (1861-1915) writer, lawyer, community leader. Born in Constantinople, Zohrab studied in public and Roman Catholic schools. A brilliant lawyer, he was also a man of letters. Zohrab, a member of the Ittihad Party and of the Turkish Parliament, and an intimate of Talaat Pasha, boldly fought against the execution of the Armenians, but all in vain. He was one of the 250 intellectuals of Constantinople to perish on April 24, 1915. He wrote essays, novels, editorials, plays, criticism, satires, polemics, and poems. His daughter Dolores Zohrab Liebman has continued his legacy by establishing the Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center at the Armenian Diocese in New York.
14. **Vahan Tekeyan** (1878-1945), poet, educator, newspaper editor, statesman, relief worker. He was among the few Armenian writers to survive the Genocide. Born in Constantinople, he studied in England, France and Germany, and settled in Cairo. After the 1908 Ottoman Reforms, he returned to Constantinople, where he was elected to the Armenian National Church Council. He was active in the Armenian Church, to which he dedicated some of his best loved poems, such as *The Armenian Church*, *The Lamp of the Illuminator*, *We shall say to God*. Having moved to Jerusalem then Cairo just before the start of WWI, he escaped the Genocide. As the tragedy unfolded, he worked tirelessly with relief efforts for orphans and educational institutions in Constantinople, Cyprus, Beirut (where he was the founding editor of the ADL newspaper *Zartok*), and finally return to Cairo, where he died in 1945. He was a Western Armenian wordsmith, crafting tightly written sonnets, addressing themes of love, homeland, justice, the Armenian language and church.
15. **Yeghishe Charents** (1897-1937) poet. A victim of the Stalinist purges at the age of 40, Charents was one of the greatest Armenian poets of the 20th century. He was passionate about the Armenian nation. Fully aware of the penalties for calling on resistance to Stalinist repression, he courageously spoke up and stood up against tyranny. Like other writers of integrity, such as Aksel Bakunts, Zabel Yesayan and Gurgun Mahari, he fell victim to the purges in 1937. After hoping that communist internationalism would be a panacea to mankind's ills, by the 1930s he was disillusioned, returning to the themes of simple love of home, family, homeland and nation as the antidote to the terror of the age.
16. **Paruyr Sevak (Ghazaryan)** (1924-1971) poet. Murdered by under suspicious circumstances at the age of 47, in what was reported as an automobile accident, Paruyr Sevak was a prophetic voice for the Armenian nation in their struggle to rediscover their soul in the rich and heroic Armenian past. He was a critic of the corruption of the Soviet establishment and excesses of Soviet policy. He sought universal messages and virtues in the experience and character of the Armenian people. His poem in tribute of Komitas vardapet, *Anreli Zangakatun* is a masterpiece of patriotic art.

17. **William Saroyan** (1908 - 1981) novelist, short story writer, playwright. Saroyan wrote about growing up poor as the son of Armenian immigrants in Fresno, California. Saroyan's stories were based on his childhood experiences or dealt with the uprooted state of an immigrant. *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze* (1934) is the story of a starving writer in a Depression-ridden society. *My Name is Aram* (1940), an international, widely translated bestseller, was about his immigrant family. His Pulitzer Prize-winning play of hope in the dark days of depression and ominous rise of Hitler, *In the Time of Your Life* (1939) expresses the bitter-sweet loss of innocence of good people in face of the world's harsh realities and the heroism of ordinary people in ordinary circumstances, overcoming the hardening of the heart to be human in spite of everything.

More on Armenian literary figures from www.armeniahouse.org

Ruth Bedevian, <http://groong.usc.edu/orig/armeniahousemuseums.html>

Leon Surmelian, *Daredevils of Sassoon*, (prose retelling of the entire epic).

OUR SAINTS AND SPIRITUAL HEROES

*For thousands of years, before the advent of celebrities and sports figures, the word "hero" had a powerful and profound meaning. Heroes were people of great strength and courage, celebrated for their boldness of character and nobility of purpose, often risking or sacrificing their lives for a great cause. **Christian saints were people of towering faith who lived and sometimes died to be the visible love of the invisible God in the world.** All the saints are spiritual heroes, but not all heroes for God have been formally acknowledged by the Church as saints. Throughout history and even today many Christians labor heroically in the Lord's name while remaining unknown. God, of course, knows those who love Him and holds them close to His heart.*

Below is a list of some of the saints of the Armenian Church, with approximate dates, a few biographical details of interest, and qualities they exemplified from which we have much to learn and emulate. Using the reflection questions at the end of each entry, take time to reflect on their contribution to our church and your life and how we can learn from their example and experience. Discuss them with friends and family. Remember them when you are in similar situations calling for the particular qualities they tapped into to overcome obstacles and be of service during their lives.

1. **St. Thaddeus (Tateos)** (1st century) One of Jesus' 12 disciples, Thaddeus is also known as Jude (Matthew 10:3; John 14:22) and is the first of two disciples to preach Christianity in Armenia. Immediately following the Lord's Ascension in 33 A.D., Thaddeus was invested with the gift of language by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and traveled to Armenia, preaching and converting many. One of these was the King of Armenia's own daughter, an event that had enormous consequences. Thaddeus was martyred in historic Armenia and is buried in what is now northwestern Iran at the monastery of Tadeivank, a cherished pilgrimage site for Armenians.

Outstanding qualities: Powerful faith, desire to witness and teach, courage against odds.

For reflection: In what simple ways does your family witness to their faith?

2. **St. Bartholomew** (*1st century*) The second of Jesus' apostles to travel to Armenia to preach and evangelize, in the mid-first century. He and Thaddeus are referred to as "the First Enlighteners of Armenia." He is also known as Nathanael and has a memorable conversation with Jesus as recorded in John 1:43-51. Upon his return to Jerusalem, Bartholomew visited Mary's tomb (she had died while he was away) and discovered it empty, believing that her body had been taken up to heaven. This was later to be referred to her as her "Assumption" and became one of the five major feast days of the Armenian Church. Bartholomew was martyred and a monastery was built over his tomb in historical Armenia, now southeastern Turkey.

Outstanding qualities: Profound faith, honesty, steadfastness, piety.

For reflection: As soon as Jesus saw Bartholomew, He knew he was an honest, sincere man, the same one who would visit Mary's tomb to pay his respects. At what times has your family done "the right thing"?

We remember

The Armenian Church remembers the missionary *Apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew* who brought Christianity to Armenia during *Advent* (late November, early December). *Sts. Thaddeus and Santookht* are also remembered in *early summer* along with the other saints who founded our church.

3. **St. Santookht** (*1st century*) Daughter of the Armenian King Sanatrook, Santookht became a follower of the charismatic preacher St. Thaddeus. She converted to Christianity – along with other family members – and when her father discovered what he considered her treachery, he threw her into prison, where her faithfulness inspired many guards to convert as well. Exasperated, the King is said to have offered his daughter the choice between a crown and a sword, life as a royal princess or death in public execution. She chose death at the tender age of 18, perhaps younger, and became the first Christian martyr of the Armenian Church.
Outstanding qualities: Powerful faith, courage, determination, willingness to take a stand on her faith.
For reflection: Have you ever made a faith decision that upset your family?
4. **St. Grigor Lusavorich (St. Gregory, the Illuminator or Enlightener)**, (*c 256-325*), *patron saint of Armenia*. As a boy, Gregory (*Grigor/Krikor* in Armenian) went into exile in Caesarea when his father was executed for assassinating his own brother, the king of Armenia (Trdat's father). He returned from exile to serve in the new king Trdat's court (their connection was unknown) and when Grigor was found to be a Christian and would not honor pagan gods, Trdat had him imprisoned in a pit. He was said to have been kept alive through princess Khosrovitookht's efforts. Fifteen long years later, after the king brutally murdered *St. Hripsimé* and *St. Gayané* and their companions and subsequently went mad,

Grigor was released from the pit in the hopes he could cure the king. He did and, in turn, baptized the royal court and army and began an ambitious campaign throughout Armenia, building churches, destroying pagan temples, and converting and baptizing thousands. Grigor is called the Illuminator, as he continued the work of the Apostles who first brought the light of Christianity to Armenia and the line of Catholicoi of All Armenians is traced back to him. *Grigor/Gregory* means "awake, vigilant," the state of all people of faith and hope, who await a better future. Like our patron saint, we are an expectant people. And that expectation reaches its height in times of rebirth and regeneration, like those we are privileged to be living today.

Outstanding qualities: Profound faith, courage, vision, energy, commitment to a goal.

For reflection: In what ways can you give your energy and talent to bringing Christ to fellow Armenians?

5. **St. Trdat, King** (298-330) The young Trdat (Tiridates) was sent to Caesarea and then Rome after the assassination of his father and other members of the royal family. When he himself eventually became king, Trdat unwittingly hired Gregory – the son of his father's assassin - to serve in his court. Discovering Gregory was Christian who had treasonously refused to worship the state's gods, Trdat imprisoned him. His later decision to execute Sts. Hripsimé and Gayané and others, tormented him to the point of insanity, a condition from which he was cured by St. Gregory who converted and baptized him. Like St. Paul, after persecuting Christians, King Trdat saw the light and accepted Christianity. He unified the Armenian people who were divided between the Byzantine and Persian Empires in period of relative peace permitting economic and cultural advances. Despite opposition, which would ultimately cost him his life, Trdat helped build Holy Etchmiadzin and supported Gregory's work as he systematically went through the countryside converting thousands. At the end of his life, Trdat retired to Mt. Sepouh, where he was martyred by hostile princes who wanted to reestablish paganism. **Outstanding qualities:** Stamina, leadership, vision, the ability to change.

For reflection: What complete turn-around has faith inspired in you?

6. **St. Khosrovidookht** (c 330) Although not much is known about King Trdat's sister Khosrovidookht, she was a powerful catalyst for the ultimate conversion of her people to Christianity. In exile as a child after her father, the King of Armenia, was murdered, she eventually took residence in the royal palace when her brother Trdat came to power. She was an early convert to the new faith and is purported to have had food delivered to St. Gregory daily to sustain him during the long years of his imprisonment. It was at her suggestion that he was brought out of the pit to cure Trdat from insanity. Side by side with Trdat's wife, Queen Ashkhen, she worked to build the first Cathedral, Etchmiadzin, eventually retiring with the Queen to Garni to live in quiet contemplation.

Outstanding qualities: Grace, determination, courage, a facilitator.

For reflection: What does it require to quietly do God's work for long years, without recognition? Would you be able to do this?

7. **St. Nerses the Great** (310-373) was the great-grandson of St. Gregory the Illuminator, who married into the Mamikonian family (see St. Vartan Mamikonian) and an officer in the Armenian army and court. His wife died at a young age, and Nerses did not marry again but devoted himself to the education of his son Sahag (who later became Catholicos and worked with Mesrob Mashdotz on the alphabet and translation of the Bible, see Sts. Sahag and Mesrob). When the reigning Catholicos died, the people clamored for Nerses to be Catholicos (353), although he was not yet ordained. He gathered the first council of the Armenian Church in Ashtishat to pass canons about family life, public, welfare, philanthropic and religious institutions, and monastic orders. He established many shelters for the poor and unfortunate, homes for the aged, hospitals, orphanages and hostels and hospices for pilgrims. He invested in education by establishing many monasteries, convents and schools that ushered in the Golden Age of Armenian culture in the 5th century. St. Nerses the Great was a man of great courage. He did not hesitate to rebuke even the king for acts of injustice and cruelty and stood solidly against any danger that threatened the Armenian people. In 373, St. Nerses attended a banquet given by the king, during which he suddenly became ill. He reached his residence with difficulty and there he died.

Outstanding qualities: courage, integrity, dedication to the faith, service to the people

For reflection: Christianity is not just a matter of belief, it must be practiced in our daily lives, at home, school, work. How do you live your faith?

We remember

The Apostle Thaddeus and Santookht, Sts. Grigor, Trdat, Ashken, Khosrovidookht, Gaiané, Hripsimé, Nerses the Great, Sahag and Mesrob in the weeks in late spring and early summer during the planting season (Pentecost and Transfigurationtide), along with the other figures who planted and grew our church. We also remember important events in the life of our patron saint St. Gregory and his sons and grandsons throughout the year.

8. **St. Mesrob Mashdotz** (350-439) First a soldier, then a priest and scribe in the royal court, St. Mesrob dreamed of a means to share the Word of God with Armenians as effectively as possible, in their own language. He eventually created – in collaboration with **Catholicos Sahag** – a unique Armenian alphabet, c. 404-6. This beautiful new alphabet was used first to translate the Bible and then many other works of theology and philosophy, during what is now referred to as the Golden Age of Armenian Literature. The story of his life and work was written by one of his students, Goriun (Koriun). The Armenian Book of Church Rituals is called *Mashdotz* after an earlier anthology of the sacraments attributed to him.

Outstanding qualities: Innovation, diligence, perseverance, imagination.

For reflection: What innovation in the Armenian Church do you and your family envision bringing faith to more Armenians? What innovation might help *your* faith grow?

9. **St. Movses Khorenatsi** (410-492) (the Father of Armenian History) was a student of Sts. Sahag and Mesrob. His *History of Armenia* told the story of Armenia from its origins through his day, collecting and synthesizing Armenia's rich oral traditions and ballads into a historical narrative that has guided Armenian people through the centuries. In his day and for many centuries thereafter, the Armenian people and homeland had been partitioned between East and West. By assuring that both parts of the Armenian nation and homeland remembered their common history, character, and destiny, he helped restore the wholeness to a divided, captive nation.

Outstanding Qualities: Creativity, imagination, insight, expressing our inner selves in words and stories that can inspire and encourage

For Reflection: How do the stories you tell about your grandparents and great grandparents create a bond between you, your parents and cousins?

10. **St. Vartan Mamikonian** (387-451) St. Sahag's grandson, St. Vartan grew up a Christian, with a strong sense of duty to protect the advances made from the time of his great great grandfather St. Gregory. He took his faith and his duty to protect his nation from regression into paganism personally. Vartan was educated by both his mother Sahaganush and his grandfather Sahag; he was a bright boy who had mastered both the Greek and Persian languages. Vartan grew up to become the commander of the Armenian Battalion of the Persian army. However, when the Persians demanded Armenia abandon its Christian faith and adopt the Zoroastrian religion, he stood up for the Christian faith of his fathers. Tensions came to a tragic end at a battle on the field of Avarayr, at the Battle of Vartanantz (or Vartanank), when he and the Armenian forces, along with the clergy led by the priest St. Ghevont gave their lives for Armenia's religious freedom. Vartan's nephew Vahan was later to secure local autonomy with the treaty of Nvarsak.

Outstanding qualities: Love for his family, dedication to excellence, military prowess, and sacrifice.

For reflection: Discuss with your family: what would you be willing to die for? What would you be willing to devote your entire life to achieving?

We remember

Sts. Vartanants on the *Thursday before Lent*, and *Sts. Ghevontiants* (the saints' day of priests) on the *Tuesday before Lent*.

11. **St. Hovhan Odznetsi (St. John of Odzun)** (Catholicos 717-728) led the Armenian Church in the difficult time right after the Arab invasion of Armenia. He was born at the end of the seventh century in the village of Odzun in northern Armenia and received his primary education from the celebrated clergyman and theologian Theodore Kertenavor. He then attended a Greek school, specializing in

Greek culture and philosophy. He is the compiler of the first Canon Book of the Armenian Church, essential to defend the autonomy of the Armenian Church and people under foreign rule. During his eleven years as Catholicos, he wrote many essays about the religious disputes of his time and compiled canons on the hymns and orders of the Armenian Church service. His character and understanding of the office of Catholicos are well illustrated in an account of a meeting with the Caliph of Damascus. The Caliph, observing the Catholicos' majestic appearance asked, "The leader of your religion (Jesus Christ) was very humble and walked around in simple garments. Why then are you, as a disciple of his, dressed with majestic clothes and ornaments?" The Catholicos immediately opened his outer garments and revealed his inner dress which was simple hair cloth and said, "This outward garment is for the people, but my real and only dress is this hair cloth."

Outstanding qualities: humility, scholarship, statesmanship

For reflection: Have you ever wished something were better organized and then tried to get people to agree on rules and plans?

We remember

St. John of Odzun on the third Saturday of Lent.

12. **St. Grigor Narekatsi (St. Gregory of Narek) (951-1003).** The greatest mystic poet of the Armenian Church and a beloved teacher and churchman in his time, St. Gregory was born to a family of scholarly churchmen and entered Narek Monastery on the south-east shore of Lake Van at a young age. Shortly before the first millennium of Christianity, Narek Monastery was a thriving center of learning. These were the relatively quiet, creative times before the Turkic and Mongol invasions that changed Armenian life forever. Armenia was experiencing a renaissance in literature, painting, architecture and theology, of which St. Gregory was a leading figure. In addition to hymns and odes, still used in our Church today, he is best known for his *Prayer Book*, the *Narek*, also known as the *Book of Lamentations*, or *Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart*, which is the opening line to each prayer. A work of unparalleled spiritual depth, the *Narek* is an encyclopedia of prayer written for all times and all nations. It is also treasured for its healing powers. The Prayer Book is the work of his mature years. He called it his last testament: "its letters like my body, its message like my soul." St. Gregory left this world in 1003, but his voice has spoken to generations of Armenians to this day, raising our awareness of God and Christ in our lives. The full-text searchable English translation of the *Narek* with Biblical annotations can be found at www.arak29.am under literature.

Outstanding qualities: Mystical, intuitive faith, using the written word to express faith.

For reflection: In what ways can you use the treasury of prayers written by Narekatsi to enhance your family's prayer life?

We remember

Sts. Mesrob, Gregory of Narek, and Nerses Shnorhali on Holy Translators' Day, in mid-October.

13. **St. Nerses Shnorhali** (1101-1173) One of the outstanding Catholicoi of the Armenian Church (1166-1173), St. Nerses was known for his pioneering ecumenical spirit, leadership, and his great literary output of poetry, letters, essays, hymns, and prayers. He revised and recompiled the Armenian Book of Hours and wrote many of the key hymns and chants of our daily prayer services, including the *Arevagal (Sunrise)* Service, commonly sung during Lent. Among his best-known works are *Jesus: Son; A Lament for Edessa;* and *I Confess with Faith*, 24 prayers (or one prayer in 24 stanzas) written to be said at each hour of the day and which are often recited during Lent (among which is the well-known prayer that begins, "Jesus, Wisdom of the Father, grant me wisdom..."). A visionary leader, in his General Encyclical, he presented a Christian world order for Armenian society.

Outstanding qualities: Expressing faith through music and poetry, administrative leadership, perseverance, vision.

For reflection: Leaders have vision. What is your vision for your family's spiritual life?

14. **St. Grigor Tatevatsi (St. Gregory of Tatev)** (1346-1409), a scholar and teacher, whose rich legacy of theological works, such as the *Book of Questions*, and his many commentaries on scripture, have been compared with the work of the twelfth-century Roman Catholic scholastic St. Thomas Aquinas. A consummate master of philosophical discourse, he was an active defender of the Armenian Christian tradition during the difficult times of the loss of the Cilician kingdom and devastating invasions by the Mongols and Turkomans. When others were inclined to question the need for a national church to shepherd the Armenian flock, he stood firmly in support of our Church, which acted as an ark sustaining the Armenian people through stormy waters of abusive foreign rule and oppression beginning with the loss of statehood in the 14th century through the restoration of statehood in the 20th century. He championed the cause of reconciling the three catholicoi of his time to unify the Armenian Church.

Outstanding qualities: Well-prepared intellect, integrity, faith and hope

For reflection: We often find ourselves in discussions, where flawed arguments can mislead people and harm our interests. Have you been in such situations? Have you been prepared with knowledge and rhetoric to make your points persuasively and save people from costly errors?

For further information (all available in English; sources 1-5 available in Armenian)

History of Armenia, Agathangelos

Mesrob Mashdotz, A Fifth Century Life, Goriun

History of the Armenian War, Yeghishe

History of Armenia, St. Movses Khorenatsi

Epic Histories, Pavstos Buzand

The Light of the World: Lives of Armenian Saints, St. Vartan Press

The General Encyclical, St. Nerses Shnorhali

Saints and Feasts, Torkom Koushagian

St. Gregory of Narek, *Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart*, English translation by Thomas Samuelian, (Yerevan: Vem, 2001 (bilingual edition, 2003 English only)).