

According to the Armenian Church calendar, this year on Saturday, July 25, 2009, Feast of St. Thaddeus the Apostle and St. Sandoukht the Virgin is celebrated.

St. Thaddeus the Apostle and St. Sandoukht the Virgin are two of the most recognized saints in the Armenian Church, as the “Great Conversion” of the Armenian nation to Christianity is significantly connected with their names.

Following the Ascension of Christ, according to the Lord’s message: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19) Thaddeus departs for Edessa. There he preaches the Gospel, and among his numerous miracles, also heals the king of Osrhoene named Abgar. In the year 44 A.D., Thaddeus travels on to Armenia and enters the domain of the pagan King Sanatrouk. After preaching in various parts of Armenia, St. Thaddeus converts many to Christianity, who become the foundation for the Armenian Church. According to tradition, St. Thaddeus brought to Armenia the spear (Arm. geghard) with which the centurion Lucian pierced Christ's side on the cross. It was kept at Ayri Vank (Monastery of Geghard) in Armenia. This sacred relic is used once every seven years in the consecration of Holy Chrism (Muron), which is distributed to Armenian Churches around the world for baptismal, ordination and other rites.

The Apostle Thaddeus, while in the region of Artaz, gains access to the royal palace and converts Princess Sandoukht, the daughter of the king, to Christianity. The Armenian King Sanatrouk becomes aware of his daughter’s conversion and exhorts her to return to her native heathen religion, but his efforts are in vain. The enraged king imprisons both the Virgin Sandoukht and St. Thaddeus and subjects them to severe torments. Another effort is made to persuade the Virgin to give up Christianity by the governor of the royal palace, an Armenian prince. This effort only ends with the prince becoming a Christian as well. The king, able to bear no more, finally orders the death of the Apostle Thaddeus and his own daughter, Sandoukht. After Sandoukht was executed, Thaddeus continued preaching and around 66 A.D. was martyred. It is said that a nearby rock opened and received the body of the apostle. The tomb is near a place now called Maku in present-day Iran, where St. Thaddeus Monastery is located. The Armenian Church remembers St. Sandoukht in February.