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ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH OF AMERICA

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EASTER MESSAGE

Today Christendom is celebrating the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Feast of the Fulfillment of Prophecies and of Promises; the Feast of the eternal dawn of Faith, Hope and Life; the Feast of the undeniable and unchallengeable victory of Life over Death.

The road toward this universal celebration of Faith, Hope and Life was paved, as our Lord Jesus Christ Himself predicted, with His Passion, Crucifixion and Entombment (Mt 16.21), in fulfillment of the Divine Blueprint, which was foreseen by the Creator as part of His eternal Plan, and which is beyond the comprehension of all human beings and of evil principalities. It is a Plan known only to the Holy Triune Godhead. It is a Plan in which we all have a part, a Plan which partially is revealed to us through the words and the actions of Our Lord, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn 14 6).

And here, after the most humiliating, depressing and frustrating experience which followed the Betrayal of our Lord Jesus Christ, let us now follow the three Myrrh-bearers, the women, who on early morning of the first day of the week leave their homes and are making for the Tomb of their beloved Rabbi, for what they think is the last time. They are going to anoint His body, a rite called for by tradition. No one is escorting them, not the Apostle Peter, who had once boldly declared: “Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you” (Mt 26. 33), nor the Apostle Thomas who had once courageously rallied his fellow Apostles saying: “Let us also go, that we may die with Him” (Jn 11.16). Not even John the “Beloved Disciple” who had stood by the Cross (Jn 19.27) is with them. It is indeed amazing to witness the unfailing commitment of these courageous women to their Master. They are going to provide him with His last Unction. They have heavy hearts. The Good News of the Abundant Life, that had once been promised to them by the Source of Life must seem as dead to them as the expected content of the tomb. They know that their work will be difficult. We can hear them asking one another: “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the Tomb?” (Mk 16 3). Yet they go on. The deep love and magnificent respect of these three Myrrh-bearers for their Beloved One, galvanized by an inner inexplicable power, motivates them to go forward, to embrace the Divine mysteries of God.

And Lo! At the entrance of the Tomb they see and hear the Angel of God asking them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen” (Lk 24.5). More Fear? More

Uncertainty? More Joy? All of these emotions filled them. They are momentarily confused. But gradually things become clear, first with the appearance of the Risen Lord and later with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

The power of the Resurrection, the undeniable victory of Life over Death, became an eternal dawn of Faith, Hope and Life, motivating the Myrrh-bearing women, the Apostles, the Saints, all of the faithful through all ages. They all walked even through the most brutal valleys of death and yet never complained, or even tried to relieve their shoulders from the burden of the Cross. On the contrary, filled with the power of the ever-victorious Crucified One, with Faith, Hope, and Life, they conquered all visible and invisible enemies.

As Armenian Christians how grateful we are to our forefathers for having welcomed the Light and the Life of the World and inaugurated the embracement of Christianity as a State Religion in 301. How grateful we are that our forefathers translated Faith into action. Their voices echoed the Divine commandment, "Let there be Light" and illuminated the land that hosts Noah's Ark. They invented the Armenian Alphabet so that they could translate the Word and Wisdom of God into their daily lives. They breathed on the stones and transformed them into "Khachkars" (Cross Stones). They sang every early morning "Blessed be the Lord," "*Horovel*," with their oxen, while they cultivated the land. They planted seeds not only for themselves, for their own use, but also for the poor, for the birds, and for strangers.

It's true that over many centuries the horizon of Armenia has periodically been darkened. Invasion after invasion, culminated by the horrendous and inhuman Genocide of 1915 tried make us desert our fertile land, to drown our peaceful songs, and even to exterminate an entire nation who had lived on that plateau for over five thousand years. Yet renewed with the providential strength of Resurrection, like a phoenix, "like stalks of wheat, after a storm has crushed but not broken them," the Armenian people always rose up from the ashes and continued to contribute their gifts to Society.

For the 2020 generation, the celebration of the Resurrection is not a mere pious tradition, but rather has an existential message. For the last three months Mankind has been experiencing a time of unparalleled global distress, agony and hopelessness, caused not by nuclear disaster but by a microscopic Virus, which has plunged us into a Pandemic. For the first time in history, as all our ethnic, color, gender, and age differences have merged into one united expression, we are shocked. For the first time, governments and scientific communities are perplexed. For many it seems as though the End of times is at our doors. The priorities of individuals, communities and nations are becoming totally reversed. In the midst of Mankind's impotence and despair, a sense of humility is growing, and we are becoming more conscious of and grateful for each and every day's blessings, the blessings that some have taken for granted. It seems that after distancing ourselves from God, the Source of Life, through Modern Philosophy – Rationalism, Empiricism, the Enlightenment, Idealism, Existentialism, Post Modernism – we are now being called to rediscover our authentic identity not in Creation but in the Creator.

There is no doubt that like the Myrrh-bearing women, a terrifying question, “Who will roll away the stone of this global threat” is strangling and torturing our minds, hearts and souls. Yet, in the light of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, if the most agonizing Friday is known as Good Friday, then perhaps the horrible experience that we are currently living, may be turn out to be a new and good starting point in the life of our Society. In this time of social distancing we, whose sins had distanced us from Him (Is 59.2), may come closer to the mercy of God. In this time of isolation we, who had often marginalized and neglected Him in our recent lives (II Chronicles 12.5), may discover the most imperative of priorities: confessing God as our sole Lord. In this time of the loss of our beloved ones, we may be transformed and actually see the Paradise Lost.

As much as it is painful to express, I believe that the lesson of Corona Virus, more than being threatening, is signaling to us the horror of eternal damnation. It is alerting us to be attentive of not only of our physical welfare, but to our spiritual wellbeing as well. It is pointing to the fragility of matter, time and space, and redirecting our focus through the EMPTY TOMB of the Risen One to Our Lord Himself.

Let us pray, let us be alert and vigilant, and let us be patient. Let us pray for the recovery of all those who have been infected by this severe virus. Let us remember in our prayers all of the physicians, nurses, and medical staff who are on the front line of this invisible war, oftentimes risking their own lives in their noble mission. Let us remember all of the public servants, who are providing for our necessities and comforts. Let us remember all officials in the many governmental agencies, who are dedicated to support the scientists while they search for the cure for this virus.

Let us all pray unto Almighty God, the Lord of Creation, to shower upon us His wisdom in order not to be misguided and perplexed by the human perspective, but rather to be led by His perspective, and to conquer each and every Gethsemane and Golgotha experience in our lives, and to turn them into victory for His glory. Let us greet each other with the most dynamic and ever-victorious good news, “Christ is Risen from the death” Halleluiah!

Prayerfully,



ARCHBISHOP ANOUSHAVAN

Prelate

Eastern United States of America

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