

Sixth Sunday of Advent – Pomegranates and Blessings

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January 1, 2017
Gospel Reading: Luke 22:24-30*

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is New Year's Day and many have been looking forward to this day because we wanted 2016 to end, thinking that when it becomes 2017, everything will change. It is wishful thinking and even New Year's Day has a special, magical ambiance around it. We think that when the calendar changes, we will magically become skinnier, healthier and even wealthier, but the reality is that our lives do not change just because the month or year changes, but because we decide to change our lives.

As Christians, we have that opportunity at every Divine Liturgy, through the holy sacraments of confession, penance and Holy Communion. We change because we come into contact with Christ who changes and makes us new. We may not like change and sometimes we think it a curse, but in reality, change can be a blessing, especially when it is from God.

About two years ago, Catholicos Karekin II established a new tradition in which churches would bless and then distribute pomegranates to the faithful. Armenians for centuries have viewed pomegranates as fruits of abundance and blessings, but why pomegranates? Pomegranates are a perfect example of God's blessings. The word, pomegranate comes from the French words *pome* (fruit/apple) and *grenate* (seedy/full of seeds). This is also where we get the word, grenade from (a weapon which explodes into many seedy parts).

Pomegranates have two important qualities which remind us of God's blessings. The first is that they are plentiful. There is a belief that every pomegranate has 365 seeds, reminding us that God continually blesses us every day of the year. Yet, having so many seeds also means that we must share the blessings we receive. "My" blessings are not only for me, but for me to share with those that need help. Second, when a pomegranate is split open, the juices splatter everywhere and look like blood. This should remind us of Christ's blood by which we are saved.

All of us desire God's blessings in this new year and I pray God does that, but we must remember three important things about God's blessings:

1. We must change how we view God's blessings. Blessings are not grandiose events like winning the lottery or miraculously being cured of an ailment, but are often small occasions, like taking a breath, having food in the refrigerator or talking to a friend. Unfortunately we often ignore or take these blessings for granted.

2. We must share our blessings with others. This is why God blesses people, so that they can use those gifts to help and bless others. We must not become greedy in our blessings, but gracious. This is one reason, the Church Fathers explain, why God blesses the wicked, so that they may be given an opportunity to help the needy.

3. We must allow God's blessings to make us better people and better Christians. I have seen, so many times, when someone is blessed and they become worse than they were before. God's blessings only improve us. If we think we've been blessed and it makes us worse of a person, then that is not a blessing, but a curse, which is not from God.

So let this year of 2017 be a year full of blessings which transform us and those around us. Let us not wait until next January 1st to change our lives or wait for new blessings from God, but remember that every day we are blessed with love, faith, hope and Christ's presence in our lives.

Amen.