

Sunday of Expulsion – Promises

*Delivered by Rev. Fr. Ghevond Ajamian
St. Sarkis Armenian Church, Carrollton, TX
February 18, 2018
Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:17-48*

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

In America, February 14th is when we celebrate St. Valentine's Day. A day when we exchange chocolates, send cards and give flowers as gifts to our loved ones. February 14th is also the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord to the Temple in the Armenian Church. We remember, as the Gospel of Luke tells, how Mary and Joseph took Jesus, forty days after His birth, to the temple in Jerusalem to dedicate Him to God. As the Gospel tells us, there was a man there, named Simeon, who had been promised by God that he would not see death before he saw God's salvation. When Mary and Joseph were bringing Jesus into the temple, Simeon saw Christ, took Him up in his arms and said, "My Lord, as you have promised, dismiss your servant in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation" (Luke 2:29-30).

Yet, these joyous events were marred this past February 14th when a school shooting took place in Florida, where 17 people were killed. At first glance we may not notice, but all three events have a common theme: promises. On St. Valentine's Day we wait for our loved ones to show the love they promised to us. Simeon waited for the promise from God to see His salvation. And after the shooting in Florida, we wait for that day when violence will end and God to fulfill His promise, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes, for there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for these things have ceased to exist" (Rev. 21:4).

We live in a fallen world, a world full of sin, tears, sorrow, pain and death. We remember this reality today, because in the Armenian Church this Sunday is called the Sunday of Expulsion. We remember how Adam and Eve disobeyed God's commandment and were exiled from paradise, heaven, and the presence of God, thus inheriting death.

Yet, God's commandment, "Do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for if you do, you will surely die" is understood differently in the East and in the West. Many Western Churches understand this commandment as a punishment or a threat, a way of God telling Adam and Eve not to eat from that tree or else He will punish them with death. The Eastern Churches, on the other hand, do not look at this as a form of punishment, but as a warning: if you eat from this tree, the result will be death. It is similar to a child cooking in the kitchen with a mother and when the stove is red hot, the mother warns not to touch it,

*Delivered by Rev. Fr. Ghevond Ajamian
February 18, 2018*

but the child touches it anyway. The child cannot say he is being punished for not listening, but rather he was warned and now he will suffer the consequences.

We learn two important truths from this story. First, God did not want death, pain and sorrow in this world, in His creation; but we brought them into it and we continue to bring them every time we disobey Him. Second, we were not created for this world. We were created for heaven, paradise and being in God's presence.

A mother and a baby camel were lying around, and suddenly the baby camel asked, "mother, may I ask you some questions? The mother said, "Sure! Why son, is there something bothering you? Baby said, "Why do camels have humps?" The mother said, "Well son, we are desert animals, we need the humps to store water and we are known to survive without water". Baby said, "Okay, then why are our legs long and our feet rounded?" The mother said, "Son, obviously they are meant for walking in the desert. You know with these legs I can move around the desert better than anyone does!" Baby said, "Okay, then why are our eyelashes long? Sometimes it bothers my sight". Mother with pride said, "My son, those long thick eyelashes are your protective cover. They help to protect your eyes from the desert sand and wind".

Baby after thinking said, "I see. So the hump is to store water when we are in the desert, the legs are for walking through the desert and these eyelashes protect my eyes from the desert than what in god's name are we doing here in the San Diego Zoo!

Often we Christians feel like these camels, as if we do not belong here and that the world is not ours. In reality, Christ tells us this, "If you belonged to this world, it would love you as its own. You do not belong to this world, but I have chosen you out of the world" (John15:19). We have been called from this world and those who are called are the Church. Those called the Church are called to live different and holy lives, to be perfect, like our Heavenly Father is perfect (which we heard in today's Gospel reading). We are called to comfort the grieving, to care for the needy, and to communicate with the lonely and isolated. By doing this, we return to paradise, heaven and truly God's presence.

This week has been a difficult week for many of us. Facing the reality of violence in our world and recognizing the frailty of human life. But just as loved ones hugged on St. Valentine's Day, and how Simeon hugged Christ in the temple, and how many of us hugged each other and our children after hearing news of the Florida shooting, may we always remember that God hugs each of us in our pain, our grief, our sorrow and in this fallen world, whispering into our ears, "I will wipe every tear from your eyes, for there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for these things have ceased to exist" (Rev. 21:4).

Amen.