

## ***New Sunday – Forgiveness***

*Delivered by Rev. Fr. Ghevond Ajamian  
St. Sarkis Armenian Church. Carrollton, TX  
April 23, 2017  
Gospel Reading: John 1:1-12*

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

April 24<sup>th</sup> is always an emotional and difficult time for Armenians and this year is no different. Besides remembering the martyrs of the genocide, we also have the movie *The Promise* debuting in theaters, the first major motion picture to depict the Armenian Genocide, and tomorrow the Texas Legislature will take up HR 191, a proposal for the State of Texas to recognize the genocide.

Every year, at this time, Armenians are caught in a difficult position with how to remember the genocide. At the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, only two years ago, the slogan was “We remember and we demand”. It is easy to know what we remember, but what exactly are we demanding? Are we demanding money, land, buildings, blood? Most likely we are demanding justice, whatever that may be. It is good to remember our Lord’s words, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied” (Matthew 5:6).

Unfortunately, more than a feeling of justice, Armenians are usually filled with hatred. Hate is a terrible thing and, in Armenian, means “to cut off”. For when we hate, we cut ourselves off from each other, from society, and even from God. Hatred destroys us from within and we do not even notice that it is happening.

The question then arises: should we forgive anyone? Forgiveness is greatly misunderstood in our society. When we think of forgiveness, we automatically think that it means we approve or condone another’s actions against us. This is because of how we react to someone asking for forgiveness. When someone says, “I’m sorry”, what is our natural reaction? *It is ok. Don’t worry about it. It is not a big deal.* When we say these things, of course we are agreeing and condoning that person’s actions. Yet this is not what forgiveness is and we are wrong to do it.

When God forgives us, He does not approve or condone what we have done. He does not say, “Oh it is ok that you committed that horrific sin”. Rather, He tells us to go and leave our life of sin (John 8:11). He allows us to enter into a relationship with Him again. And we see this in the Armenian words that are used in Classical Armenian for forgiveness. The Armenian word to forgive (ներել/nerel) is connected to the word “with in” (ներս/ners),

because when we ask for forgiveness, we are asking to be brought back into a relationship with that person.

So again, I ask the question: Should we forgive people? More specifically, should we as Christian Armenians forgive the Turks? The answer is yes. It is through forgiveness that we allow relationships to be formed and for us to move on with our lives. Rather than wallowing in grief, anger, and hatred, we can rise up to joy, forgiveness, and love.

But how can we do such a thing? How can we forgive them for what they did to 1.5 million Armenians? The answer is found in the example of our Coptic brothers and sisters who are suffering like us with daily martyrs and suicide attacks on their churches, and during worship in Divine Liturgy. They do not seek revenge, blood, or even death. They do not sow seeds of hatred in their children's hearts.

Surprisingly, they come forward forgiving and praying for those who hate them. Widows say, "Thank you. You put my husband in heaven". Mothers exclaim, "Thank you. You gave my son eternal life". Priests preach, "We wish to tell you of Jesus Christ and how God is love". Their forgiveness cannot bring back their loved ones or undo the past, but it can open the future to love and it has caused hundreds and thousands of Muslims to convert to Christianity and be baptized.

Today in the Armenian Church calendar is New Sunday, when we remember the new life we have in Christ's resurrection. This is an opportunity for new life with others, among us and even with the Turks. Many Turks do not admit they have done anything wrong, and as such, we may think we should not forgive them, but it is Christ's example we must follow. For even Christ, from the cross, forgave, saying, "Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do". The same is with the Turks - they do not know what they do, but we should still forgive.

Through forgiveness and the ultimate death of our own pride and grudges that we hold against other, resurrection and new life can take place. We Armenians are still in the tomb, like Christ was, and only when we truly forgive, then we can come out of the tomb and experience life and resurrection.

Amen.