

"Still Loyal to God." *

"BE LOYAL UNTO THE LORD YOUR GOD, AS YOU HAVE DONE UNTO THIS DAY."
(JOSHUA 23:8)

For many years the Israelites lived in Canaan. They built homes and cities. They cultivated the land and lived in peace. How much they enjoyed the land that God had given them!

When Joshua, was about to die, he wanted to talk to his people one more time. He sent messengers through the land calling the people and their elders for a meeting.

~~As they came~~, Joshua spoke to them for the last time. "Be very courageous," he told them, "keep all God's laws. There are still heathen in the land, but you must drive them out. Have nothing to do with them. Do not bow and serve their gods. Be loyal unto the Lord your God, as you have done unto this day."

In the year 301 A.D. a most important event happened, not only in the history of Armenia, but in the annals of Christian Church. The Christian faith, ^{which} ~~from the beginning~~, had been relentlessly persecuted ^{throughout} ~~through~~ the world, was proclaimed as the national religion of Armenia. It was not an easy thing to adapt, a religion at that time whereby the most powerful empires, Rome and Persia, denounced and persecuted.

Our acceptance of Christianity and the teachings of Christ, taught us that God, the Father, is interested in individual men, women, and children. Jesus put strong emphasis on this concept. He noted that God cares for us. He knows what we need (Lk. 12:30). He knows our hearts (Lk. 16:25) and sees the secret (Matt. 6:4). God knows individuals so

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well that Jesus in his figurative language said, "Even the hairs of your head are all numbered"(Matt.10:30). His interest in people is a loving concern: "Your Father who is in heaven gives good things to those who ask him(Matt. 7:11)".

When a nation becomes Christian, he is expected to search for God's will and do it. Those who enter the Kingdom are those who "do the will of my father who is in heaven(Matt. 7:21). They follow Him by his words as well as by his deeds. On one occasion he scolded the Pharisees: "You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men(Mk. 7:8). The commandment is to love God with all one has.

How deeply the Armenian soul had become imbued with Christianity can be attested by the subsequent martyrology. When, in the middle of the fifth century, the Persians essayed, first by promises and then by force, to have the Armenians embrace fire-worship, they entirely failed. In the memorable Battle of Avarayr, 451, the leader Vartan Mamigonian, perished like a Judas Maccabeaeus. A Persian General was so impressed by the tenacious resistance of the Armenians, that he exclaimed: "These people have put on Christianity not like a garment, but like their flesh and blood. And above all have chosen death rather than life."

Because we have promised to be loyal to God, we accepted the Bible as our father and the Church as our mother, Christianity became a part of the body, bone, mind and soul of every Christian, man, woman, young and old, so the inhuman, barbaric terrible cruelties which neither can be told by words nor written on papers, could not force them to give up Christianity.

Today God not only continues his interest in all that he created, but remains active: "My Father is working still."(Jn. 5:17) This God who makes the sun shine, the rain to fall. It is He who feeds the ravens and clothes the grass of the field. It is God, who hears and answers the prayers of his children if we promise to be loyal to Him.

In the midst of changes, such basic things are the tree, the flower, and the supreme end of creation, man, never becomes obsolete, but ~~continues~~ continues to delights the senses with each new birth and blossom.

The Armenian Church, the oldest national church in Christianity, is insolubly bound of love, of blood, of flesh, and the spirit of the Armenian people, continues forever young, forever creative, the beautiful mother who inspires, comforts and protects her children through all of life's progressive stages. *

St. John Armenian Church in Milwaukee County in her 30th Anniversary will continue with those of the present who are working together, in the spirit of our forefathers, loyal to eternal principles, patriotic to our adopted land, to bring into the world of today new thoughts, new deeds and new beauty, and All to the Glory of God without whom nothing is of any avail.

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* Dedication Book, Armenian Church of Our Saviour.