

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

"I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."
2 Corinthians 6: 18

These words, condensed by Saint Paul from Old Testament readings, comprise the promise of the Lord given to His people. The promise was fulfilled through the Incarnation and the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who opened before us the way to salvation and gave each one of us the opportunity to be accepted by God as His child and to accept God as father.

The rise of humanity to the level of Divinity could not be achieved by man, since our human nature is limited and weak. God in His omnipotence could have pulled man out of his sinful existence and raised him to heaven, but such an action would have meant the suppression of man's free will. Man had to be given the choice to make decisions by free will. Prior to the Incarnation, man was condemned to death because of original sin. Through the Incarnation, God reestablished His bond with mankind. The channel of communication between God and man was reopened. Through the Resurrection, the human nature in Christ, united as one with the Divine nature, rose to heaven, making it possible for mankind to be one with the Son of God.

This Sunday we continue celebrating the Resurrection of our Lord, and this year, since April 7—the day we Armenians commemorate the Annunciation

of the Virgin— coincides with the First Sunday after Easter, we turn our thoughts to the Incarnation as well.

It must be very clear to every Armenian that if Christ had no human nature, His Resurrection would not have been an unusual event and would not have done anything for us. God is omnipotent and He can rise to heaven or come down to earth any time He wishes. If Christ had no divine nature, He could not rise at all. The Resurrection of the Incarnated Divinity was, however, significant for us, since it set the pattern for our salvation. As Christ's divine nature became one with this human nature, we must try to be one with God in order to inherit the kingdom of heaven.

During this Easter season, reflecting on the spiritual rebirth of our people in our homeland and throughout the diaspora during this difficult period has given me a great deal of spiritual satisfaction . The past several decades have been difficult for us Armenians.

Our communities in the Middle Eastern countries have suffered greatly as a result of wars and turmoils. What were once large and thriving communities have been reduced to small entities with limited social, cultural and religious life. Worse than that, the prognosis for the political future of Armenia is uncertain. This time the fault is not ours; the circumstances are not good, our situation is in the vortex of turmoil and confusion is extremely dangerous.

Realizing the need to reach God now more than ever, this Easter our people everywhere flocked the churches and cathedrals in Armenia, Artsakh, and throughout the diaspora. The St. Vartan Cathedral was full of people during the

four-day services that began on Holy Thursday. In a telephone conversation, His Holiness Vasken I, Catholicos of All Armenians, informed me that as many as forty thousand Armenians attended the services at Holy Etchmiadzin on Easter Sunday. Among the faithful were the President of Armenia, Levon Ter Petrossian; the Prime Minister, Vazken Manoogian; and several government officials.

We must not abandon this quest for God. Through very difficult periods, God has kept us from total extinction and given us spiritual strength to face the insurmountable problems that stood before us. What may seem impossible in human terms is not impossible in God's eyes. We need Him particularly today, and instinctively we have turned to Him. This instinct is inherent in our culture, for which we are grateful to our ancestors, but we must go beyond that stage and seek spiritual knowledge. Living in a free country such as this, we have every opportunity to educate ourselves and our children in the knowledge of God. We must also help our compatriots in Armenia so that they can acquire the same knowledge.

Without God, we could not survive the odds against us. The political pressures, social concerns and economic stresses are so serious in Armenia that the spirit of our people could easily succumb to these. Don't think that our communities thousands of miles away would remain intact from problems affecting the homeland. We need spiritual support from heaven as much as our brothers and sisters in Armenia. The lack of such support would weaken us as well and

several decades of hard work to build parishes, churches, cultural halls and schools and other institutions will be futile.

The important lesson of this day, as we celebrate the Resurrection and the Annunciation, is to reach out for God and persevere in our faith to obtain real salvation.

If in our days of difficulty we Armenians seek God and make an effort to become His sons and daughters, He will stand by our side and guide us and we shall say: "But thou, O Lord, art a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head [Psalms, 3:3]." Amen.