

## **ADDRESS IN SOUTH MILWAUKEE**

Dear Faithful,

It is a wonderful tradition that we Armenians have: worshipping God on Sunday Morning in His house, participating in the mystery of the Divine Liturgy, and continuing the Christian fellowship at a banquet, sharing the Christian *agape* or meal of love. This tradition began on this continent exactly one hundred years ago, when our fathers built the first Armenian church in Worcester. The love of God, the love of His Church and the love of our people brought them together then and brings us together now.

Being among you is an especially uplifting experience for me. Located in an area that is almost at the northwestern boundary of our Diocese you have maintained our religious, cultural and national traditions over many decades. Despite the fact that you are a parish with a modest membership and with no pastor at present, you have maintained your existence. I thank God Almighty for giving you the patience, perseverance, strength and faith to withstand the moral, social, and economic hardships in order to keep this house of God open. The Holy Scripture states that the man "who remains steadfast under trial" is a happy man. Every trial is a test and the person who passes the test "will receive for his prize the gift of life promised to those who love God." This morning as I officiated the Divine Liturgy I felt the happiness in your hearts and the intensity of your devotion to our Church. Sharing that Christian feeling with you is a source of spiritual strength to me as the pastor of our vast Diocese and alleviates the burden of my office.

This joyous gathering that has brought together so many members of this parish is not, and cannot be, a one time affair. The Church is eternal and not a temporal institution. It is eternal because it is the body of Jesus Christ. Faith in the Church rejuvenates the corporate body. Your fathers and forefathers who founded this church felt the importance of the Church and God in their lives. They were poor immigrants

faced with the harsh realities of life. In a new and a vast country they had to find a way of making a living, help poor relatives abroad, support several Armenian organizations and help their brothers and sisters in their homeland. In those days it was not unusual to see men give half of their weekly earnings to Armenian causes. With that generation the house of God had priority to everything else. They set a wonderful example for us, since the Armenian Church is the most traditional and Armenian of all of our institutions and organizations. The Armenian Church holds the secret to the salvation of our souls. Like our fathers we in our turn should make a practice of living at our spiritual home and raising our children therein. The Church and Armenian community life around the Church is the healthiest atmosphere for Armenian families, for boys and girls, men and women and old and young. God is always with those who live close to His Church. He will guide His faithful, give hope to those who are in despair, console those who are afflicted with problems and losses, give strength to those who need help and cure those who are sick.

Our Church is not only a sanctuary for us but also the source of our identity as Armenians. We must take pride in the Armenian Church, in her history of almost two thousand years and in the Christian civilization our people developed throughout the past twenty centuries. The realization of these facts is very important for a community like yours which is distant from large concentration of Armenians and has been without a permanent pastor for several years. The fact that you have survived despite the odds against you makes you an unusual and an exemplary parish. Let me take this opportunity to tell you that you, the faithful Armenian Christians of South Milwaukee, are the most important and valuable element in this parish. A pastor can guide you and help you but you but cannot make you believe and worship God unless you want to do. You have already shown your devotion to the faith of your fathers. You must persevere in your faith and transmit the Armenian spirit to your children. I am doing everything in my power to enlist as many people as I can in the spiritual army of the

Lord. I hope that soon I shall be in a position to appoint a pastor to your parish. In the meanwhile be strong in the Lord and may God protect you from all kinds of tribulations.