

BINGHAMTON - FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

In the Name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The ecclesiastical calendar of the Armenian Church reminds us that we have entered the fifty-day period known as Hisnag in Armenian and Advent in English. This is the period that precedes the great feast of the Theophany, which we shall celebrate on the 6th of January. The fathers of our Church have set aside the following month and a half as a time of reflection, meditation, penance and introspection. This first Sunday was preceded by a week's fasting; another fasting period of a week's duration will precede the feast of Theophany and still a third one will come in mid-December.

The fasts, the penance and the meditations are intended to turn our thoughts to serious matters. Just as we make preparations to examine our accounts as the year approaches its end, Advent gives us an opportunity to turn our attention to our lives and pose serious questions. Christ's striking parable in today's reading from the Gospel of St. Luke, chapter 12, verses 13 to 31, most appropriately sets our mood to think in terms of the most precious thing we have in life, namely life itself and its meaning.

What had given rise to the parable was a materialistic question posed by someone in the crowd Christ addressed - "Teacher, he said, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me." Refusing to play the role of judge and divider over that man and his brother, Our Lord demonstrated the point ~~he~~ wished to make by the following parable. A rich man, extremely content with the yield of his land but perplexed by the fact that his stores had no space for the new crop, decided to pull down his barns and build larger ones. The thought of having so many possessions and material goods inspired him to entertain the possibility of enjoying his life for a long time, spending his life in merriment, banquets and feasts.

This man's self-contented state of mind did not last long, for God said to him: You fool, tonight you will die! Who will take possession of the riches you have amassed?

In our quest for financial security, particularly in these difficult days when the economy is not good, it is appropriate for each one to pause for a short ~~while~~ ^{while} and ask ourselves what life is all about - why am I here? Some of us, like the rich man in the parable, feel secure and thank our frail human intellects for making the right decisions to ensure our possessions and investments. Many others are overwhelmed by the economic problems running rampant at this time and are totally overtaken by the misfortunes that have affected

their investments, businesses and professions. We see many people who are in despair. The numbers of the homeless and jobless have risen and the general mood in the country is far from being a festive one. The common denominator between those who are doing well and those who are suffering is material possessions.

what changes
Our Lord shows us a way which reduces the human yearning for material things to a secondary level of importance. He says, "a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." That is not the purpose of life and one must not develop an anxiety over ~~that~~ one eats, wears and possesses. There is a deeper meaning to life. The conclusion of today's reading in verse 31 spells out that meaning: "seek His kingdom, and these things shall be yours as well." The vicissitudes of time and the fluctuating economy will bring us fortune or take it away from us. Yet, when our soul departs from our body, we will be impervious to these changes. We will be unable to take with us any of our possessions. What remains for us from life will be only the record of our actions to approach our Creator. Have we made an endeavor to seek God's eternal kingdom? How do we go about it? Our Saviour taught us the way to reach God by instructing us: "give for alms those things which are within; and behold, everything is clean for you."

At this time - more so now than at any other time - each person in our community has the opportunity to seek the Kingdom of heaven by helping our fellow men. Despite all the economic problems we have in this country, we are materially more fortunate than all the other nations in the world. As good Christians we must extend our helping hand particularly to our brothers and sisters in Armenia who will face a very severe winter. Some have no shelter while others need clothing and food. There are also people in dire need in our cities here in this country. Help our Diocesan efforts to come to the rescue of our own kind and also contribute to the international charities of your choice. Build for yourselves treasures in the kingdom of God, since ~~these~~ ^{they} will survive all ~~the~~ recessions and inflations. May the Advent season be one of rich spiritual yield for each and every one of you and may God Almighty bless you and your own, keeping ~~his~~ ^{His} protective ~~hand~~ ^{Hand} on all of you. Amen.