

Nov 23 1990

PHILADELPHIA - BANQUET

It was six months ago that 88th Annual Diocesan Assembly elected me to serve as the Primate of this great Diocese. During this time I have come to realize that I alone shall be unable to achieve anything without you, the faithful. You are the source of my energy and my inspiration. The Latin saying, *vox populi vox dei*, 'voice of the people is the voice of God', was not said in vain. As I visit the different parishes of our Diocese and listen to the parishioners who are forever working for the Church, I am hearing the voice of God which is guiding me in my decisions.

My position as your Primate has given me the unique opportunity to see at close range the service that certain parishioners render to the Church with total commitment and Christian devotion. Their selfless dedication encourages others, particularly members of the young generation, to attach themselves to the houses of God and follow their example. I have come to realize that faith in a parish grows not only through the sacraments, the liturgy and miracles, but also through devout people who sacrifice their time, abilities, possessions, knowledge, talents and means for the love of God. We are grateful to the Almighty to find in every parish people who have spent a lifetime in the service of God. Frequently such people come from devout families and carry the tradition established by parents, grandparents, and great grandparents. They are blessed with the distinction of spending a lifetime under the sacred arches of the Church. I believe that a life spent in the vicinity of holiness is affected by its environment. Blessed are such people who tend to the house of God and render service to His flock. Their lives are filled with bliss, since they are the inhabitants of the Garden of Eden on this earth.

The faithful Armenians in the Greater Philadelphia area showed their Christian spirit by responding positively to the needs of their brothers and sisters in Armenia who had been afflicted by a disastrous earthquake in December of 1988. Despite the limited number of people in the parishes of this area, all sides, denominations and persuasions joined together to raise a large sum of money to assist Armenia. I understand that there is willingness on your part to continue raising more funds for the same purpose.

I just returned from Armenia where I had the opportunity to visit some of the sites and particularly Stepanavan, where I was present at the opening of the Armenian-American Village, an entire complex or a quarter sponsored by the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America. What I saw there made me proud of the

contribution of our Diocese. It would have also made you very proud. Once again our community in the United States showed its generosity, philanthropy and Armenian spirit. You can rest assured that your kindness will not be forgotten by God.

The needs of our homeland are manifold and we who trace our ancestry to Armenia have a religious and moral obligation to help. Stepanavan was just one of the cities devastated by the earthquake; forty per cent of Armenia was destroyed. Foreign governments and philanthropic organizations undertook the task of providing immediate shelter to the needy. The more difficult part of the work, however, is still before us, namely the long term restoration of the country and the spiritual revival of our people which must be mainly undertaken by us. A stronger and vibrant Armenia will be a source of inspiration and pride to us. If foreigners are willing to help our brothers and sisters, we must work harder to excel them in our efforts. The Greater Philadelphia area Armenians are to be commended for the work they have already done. You must keep up with your own record and continue your united efforts until our homeland is able to stand on her feet.

This community is fortunate to have an energetic Pastor such as the Very Rev. Fr. Haigazoun Melkonian who was instrumental in moving the parishioners of his Church to do their share of the work. The American-born Fr. Melkonian is a member of the Brotherhood of St. James in Jerusalem, of which I also am a member. As a true Armenian he spared no effort to make the fundraising for Armenia a success. He needs praise for his selfless dedication to our Church and to the cause of our people. He has been a well-liked pastor in the parishes he has served. In addition to his pastoral duties, he also has engaged in literary activities and translated into English a classic book on saints and sacraments of the Armenian Church. This publication, put out by the Diocesan Department of Religious Education, will soon be available to the public. Work of the type rendered by your Pastor and the efforts of your community will not go unrewarded by the Lord.

May God bless you and may he prosper his Church.

Amen.