

Nov 24, 1990

PHILADELPHIA - HRASHAPAR

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

On this day we must all be grateful to God for giving us the opportunity to participate in this solemn service which is accorded to Bishops. This occasion gives me an opportunity to share with you certain memories and thoughts.

It was only one month ago that I myself became the recipient of the Spirit of God as I stood before the altar of the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin and was consecrated bishop by the hand of His Holiness Vasken I, Catholicos of All Armenians. As I made my vows before the Altar of Descent where the Only Begotten descended in St. Gregory's vision, I realized that I was making a commitment before God to serve my Church and my people. I felt the calling of the Spirit that day as I had done many years ago when I first made my vows in the Cathedral of St. James in Jerusalem. Whether one is bishop, priest, deacon or a faithful layman, we are all servants of God. Serving God entails service and help to our own kind who are created in His image, to our church and our people.

The calling of the Holy Spirit must be heeded. There is no way of escaping it. Those who try to silence the divine calling in their hearts, suffered in spirit and turn to it after much turmoil. The Lord chooses those whom He needs to till His pasture, which needs to be cultivated. There is need for tillers and they must come from your midst. The flock must not be left without shepherds. Otherwise, it will scatter. While at Holy Etchmiadzin, we were very happy to learn that the Seminary of the Holy See had increased the number of students. I learned that now there are as many as 120 young men studying to become priests of the Armenian Church. They will serve as pastors of newly reopened churches in the towns and villages of our homeland. Through them and their missionary activities our people will once again be drawn close to God and live according to the precepts of the Holy Scriptures.

The revival of religion in Armenia has also affected us in the diaspora. We are living in a historic period of national and religious rebirth. I and several other clergymen from our Diocese sensed that recently in Jerusalem where we had gone to be present at the enthronement of our former Primate and my predecessor, His Beatitude Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, as the 91st Patriarch of the Holy Apostolic See of Jerusalem. The experience of witnessing such a solemn ceremony with fourteen Archbishops and bishops participating and laying their hands on the head of the new Patriarch was a religious experience in itself. The exuberance in the hearts of

the local Armenians and the pilgrims from distant lands seemed to affect even the non-Armenian guests present in the ancient Cathedral of St. James. In Jerusalem where our Lord lived, was crucified, died, was buried and rose from the dead, we felt the beginning of a new era. The new Patriarch has made a promise to himself to reorganize the Seminary so that the Brotherhood of St. James would replenish itself with manpower and the parishes in the different Dioceses throughout the diaspora would not be left without pastors. We must help him morally, financially and above all by encouraging those young men in our midst who have the call to attend the Seminary of Jerusalem so that Archbishop Manoogian could carry out his work.

The St. Nersess Seminary in this country also needs all the encouragement necessary to produce graduates who could enter the priesthood. Our three seminaries - Holy Etchmiadzin, Jerusalem and St. Nersess - must become sources of inspiration for us and centers of learning and spirituality. It gives us great joy to see our students at St. Nersess chant the morning and evening offices on a daily basis. In a similar way the Name of the Almighty is praised in the Cathedrals of Holy Etchmiadzin and St. James. Holiness abounds in the hearts of all these young men and Christian faith is ever growing in them. They will someday be the bearers of the Good Tidings which they will bring to us.

Most future priests have received their calling in their parish churches. The local parish priest, a deacon, sub-deacon or a faithful somehow has played a role in their decision to turn to God. The lower orders of the hierarchy of the Church serve as the threshold for the priesthood. We pray that today's ordination may also serve that purpose. I direct my words to the young in who felt the movement of the Spirit in their hearts today. Heed the voice within yourselves and enter the service of the Lord. The burden of his yoke is heavy and difficult to bear but rewarding.

May God bless the Armenian Church and particularly the Parish of the Holy Trinity Church of Cheltenham. May this parish continuously witness the propagation of faith. Amen.