

Archbishop Khajag Barsamian

Speech: Fr. Diran Papazian Retirement Tribute—December 11, 1994
Sts. Joachim and Anna Armenian Church, Palos Heights, IL

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Let me begin by conveying to you greetings from the Holy See of Etchmiadzin. I also bring the blessing of His Beatitude Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, Patriarch of Jerusalem and Locum Tenens of the Holy See, whom I saw during my trip to Armenia in November. I would like start these remarks with a few reflections of that visit.

An Armenian traveling to his homeland these days is likely to feel a flood of powerful emotions when he touches his native soil. Looking at the faces of our people in Armenia's cities and villages, one naturally feels concern, and a strong desire to help them through this difficult period. At the same time, one feels an overwhelming sense of admiration, at the courage and faith which inspires them to carry on. And one also feels pride—great pride—that these, too, are our brothers and sisters, struggling against tremendous odds to build a homeland for all Armenians.

As an American, of course, the emotion which most affects you is simple and humble gratitude. We are so blessed in this country—we have been granted so many gifts, and we must be thankful to God for His bounty. But in recognizing the gratitude we owe to God, we must also recognize the responsibility that goes hand-in-hand with the gifts He has given us. In this regard, we can all be proud of the work being done by the Fund for Armenian Relief, the Diocese's relief organization, to help make Armenia healthy and productive.

God did not give us these gifts so that we could simply waste them. He has given us health and prosperity and opportunity so that we may use these things for higher purposes—for God's purposes. We who have received so much are in a powerful position to help others—and these others can be the people of Armenia, our own neighbors, or our fellow church-members. Following the example of our Lord, by using our gifts to help others in their time of need, we may become nobler and better souls ourselves.

For this reason, it is a pleasure for me to be present here tonight, as we pay tribute to the life-long ministry of my brother in Christ, Fr. Diran Papazian. God has been generous to Fr. Diran: He has given him many fine and valuable gifts. In response, Fr. Diran has put these gifts to excellent use, as a priest of the Armenian Church, and as a faithful servant of God.

This evening's tribute is in recognition of Fr. Diran's retirement from active pastorship. But I have no doubt that his retirement will be full of the kind of creative energy and activity which marked his four decades of service before God's altar.

As a priest, Fr. Diran has brought energy and enthusiasm to everything he undertook, from celebrating the Divine Liturgy, to counseling souls in times of distress. Over the years, countless people have been touched or guided by Fr. Diran. And these people—including the people of this parish—reserve a special place in their hearts for this beloved teacher, pastor and friend.

In his younger days, Fr. Diran studied at the Patriarchal Seminary of Jerusalem, served the Armenian Sunday schools in Lebanon, and earned an advanced degree from Harvard Theological School. He distinguished himself as a writer, poet and thinker; and his work attracted the attention of his teacher, the late Hagop Oshagan—perhaps the greatest Armenian literary critic of our times.

He went on to tend to the needs of God's Armenian flock, in our communities in Detroit, Cleveland, New Jersey and most recently Palos Heights. Needless to say, he has had a profound effect on the parishioners of the Sts. Joachim and Anna community, and his daily presence and guidance will be sorely missed by the local people here, as well as by Fr. Diran's fellow brothers in Christ.

In the course of his ministry, Fr. Diran has invigorated the life of our Diocese, and his leadership has inspired others—both clergy and laymen—to answer the call of apostleship to Christ. Among these is the woman he chose to share his life and work with, Yeretzgin Rosalie. As we honor Fr. Diran today, we cannot forget the services Yeretzgin has rendered to our Church. Hers also has been a life-long dedication to God. Their marriage is a touching example of the sweet rewards of the Armenian Christian tradition.

As a natural extension of his lifetime of pastoral work, Fr. Diran has also directed his gifts towards the vital task of nourishing the flame of faith within the hearts of our people in the homeland. His work with the HAVAD group has been inspiring and noble, and should serve as an example to us all. I certainly hope it will serve as an opportunity for more people—both clergy and lay—to get involved in the basic mission of the Church to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. On reflection, that mission has been beautifully expressed through the ministry of Fr. Diran, who took the gifts he was given, and returned them to his Church, his people, his homeland, and ultimately to God.

The Armenian Church is fortunate to number such men among its princes. In recognition of his admirable gifts, and of his many, faithful years of labor in the fields of the Lord, I would like to extend my personal gratitude and congratulations to Fr. Diran Papazian, and wish him and Yeretzgin Rosalie all the Lord's blessings in the coming years. May God bless you all.

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