

SERMON DELIVERED AT STS. JOACHIM AND ANNE CHURCH, PALOS HEIGHTS, IL.

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

Today's reading from chapter 9 of the Holy Gospel of Luke teaches us a basic lesson in humility, a quality which is a must for every Christian. Above and beyond all other religions, Christianity is a religion that an individual practices not in isolation but in a social context. This is best exemplified by the Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, 'an assembly,' from which our Armenian *yegeghetsi* derives. In any kind of a social context, the major operative factor is obviously the way human beings behave toward one another. Today's reading presents us our Lord's teaching about the way a Christian should behave toward another Christian.

The story of the Gospel is a familiar one to all of us; not only the part about the argument that arose among the disciples of Christ as to which of them was the greatest, but also the fact that such arguments or tendencies and thoughts are always present in all social gatherings, be they of a secular nature or even religious. If an argument of this nature could rise among the disciples in Christ's presence, it could also rise at any time and at any place. Anticipating the disciples' thoughts, our Lord delivered a unique message, one that has a universal application. Taking a child and putting him by his side, Christ instructed the following: "Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me; for he who is least among you all is the one who is great."

The idea expressed in this statement is concentrated on receiving the child in His name. The Armenian word for 'receives' is ընկալիցի, literally 'accepts'. The example of a child is significant. We associate with a child innocence from sinful ways, lack of pretentiousness and powerlessness. There is no doubt that in the present context a child represents not only Christ but also a human who has imitated Christ. Thus accepting a child is the same as accepting another Christian and Christ Himself.

In answer to the question that the disciples had "as to which of them was the greatest," Christ makes a statement that was not expected. In the first place, He avoids making a distinction among the disciples. He says, the least among you is the one who is great. The Armenian version probably expresses the sense of this statement better than the English by translating the passage in question as follows: "for he who is the child among you all is the one who shall be great." In other words the person or persons in the body

of Christians who is like Christ is the one who shall be great. Notice that there is no comparison here between different classes of Christians nor a distinction between a leader and followers. There can be no such comparison or distinction, because one is either a practicing Christian or not. Any one who imitates Christ is great.

This wonderful lesson of our Lord and Saviour teaches those of us who are within the fold to strive toward reaching a goal where humility prevails. Instead of considering whether we are better or greater than our brothers and sisters in Christ, we must sincerely humble ourselves to reach the degree of humility that the Son of God experienced prior to His glorious Resurrection. Imagine for a moment what it meant for the Second Person of the Trinity to suffer the uttermost humility of being degraded, insulted, spat at and crucified like a common criminal. Experiencing that very suffering and humiliation will give us a very different perspective about human relations. We will be ready to accept Christ and each other as brothers and sisters. We shall no longer feel any social and cultural superiority toward our brothers and sisters in other communities and particularly in Armenia where there is now a dire need for everything, material things, moral support and spirituality. Among those in Armenia there are many Christ-like people whom we must accept in His Name. This must be an integral part of our practice as true Christians. The key word for us Armenian Christians on a local and a global level must be love for one another. This divine attribute must permeate our entire being so that we live and work in harmony and try to put an end to human suffering in our homeland and throughout the world. Amen.