

FR KAREKIN KASPARIAN 20TH ANNIVERSARY TRIBUTE  
MAY 14, 1994—ST. JAMES CHURCH, PURCHASE, NY

Let me begin by conveying the paternal greetings of His Holiness Vasken I to this gathering. The Catholicos personally expressed his affection for the flock of our Diocese during my recent visit to Armenia, from which I returned just a few days ago.

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 sorrow, 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.

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 ministry of my brother in Christ, Fr. Karekin Kasparian. God has been generous to Fr. Karekin—He has given him many fine and valuable

gifts. In response, Fr. Karekin has put these gifts to brilliant use, as a priest of the Armenian Church, and as a faithful servant of the Almighty.

This evening's celebration is in recognition of the 20th anniversary of Fr. Karekin's ordination, but in truth, his ministry to the Church and her people has been even longer than that. As a seminarian and deacon, he brought all of his energy and enthusiasm to everything he undertook, from teaching the beauty of the Divine Liturgy, to counseling a fellow soul in a time of distress.

Today, there are many people across our Diocese who, at a critical juncture in their lives, were touched or guided by the young Deacon Hovhannes Kasparian.

These people—and the many others to whom Fr. Kasparian has ministered over the years—reserve a special place in their hearts for this beloved teacher, pastor and friend.

Fr. Karekin's efforts have invigorated the ACYOA, the St. Nersess Seminary, and our Diocese as a whole, and his leadership has inspired others—both clergy and laymen—to answer the call of apostleship to Christ.

Needless to say, Fr. Karekin has had a profound effect on each of the parishioners of the St. James Church. It was his idea to establish an Armenian Church in the Westchester area, and through his guidance it has grown from humble beginnings into an active and spirited community. Today, the plan to build a new church is

coming to fulfillment, and it gives me great joy to see this community raising a new Armenian sanctuary to the glory of God.

The latest project which Fr. Karekin has undertaken is the natural extension of his lifetime of pastoral work. As a leader of the Diocesan HAVAD committee, Fr. Karekin is directing his gifts towards the vital task of nourishing the flame of faith within the hearts of our people in the homeland. The HAVAD group is doing inspiring and noble work in Armenia; it should serve as an example for us all—and I hope it will serve as an opportunity for more people to become involved in the basic mission of the Church to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We can see that mission beautifully expressed in the ministry of Fr. Karekin, as he takes the gifts he has been given in such abundance, and returns them to his Church, his people, his homeland, and ultimately to God.

The Armenian Church is fortunate to number such a man among its princes. In recognition of Fr. Karekin's admirable gifts, and of his many, faithful years of labor in the fields of the Lord, this encyclical has been delivered from His Holiness Vasken I, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians. It conveys Vehapar's blessings, and bestows upon the Reverend Fr. Karekin Kasparian the degree of "avak kahana." May God bless you all.

END