

Written and spoken by Sophie Gardavice
at Interfaith Service.

Extermination is generally a word used for vermin and the like, but today we pause to mark the genocide, the extermination of nearly 2 million Armenians who died in their own homeland.

I feel honored to be asked to share in this service - and would like to relate briefly why we are here. My people, the Armenians, are an ancient people. They lived in the cradle of civilization - geographically located in a land that saw many travelers and many conquerors. They adopted Christianity as a national religion in 301 AD, the first nation to do so. In the 15th century, the Ottoman Turks became the rulers of the ancient homeland of Armenia, and the Armenians became their subjects. The people of whom I speak were ordinary, and extraordinary. Shopkeepers, farmers, artists and craftsmen. They were parents, grandparents, children and their cousins - just like you and me. Their counterparts lived in the Turkish communities and in SPITE of their sameness, the Armenians were guilty of being DIFFERENT; and besides, being Armenian/Christian in a Turkish/Moslem country was dangerous. I was born in this

country, but my parents weren't, and they know firsthand what it was like to live in an alien land, which once had been their own.

More than 300,000 Armenian lives were snuffed out in 1894-1896 because they were different. A very frightening message: A PERSON COULD NOT BE WHO HE WAS! The next was in 1909, in Cilicia, where 30,000 Armenians were put to death.

I read from an order by Talaat Pasha, one of the leaders of the ^{Turkish} government, to the Governor of Aleppo, dated Sept 16, 1916.

Quote:.....by order of the Assembly had decided to destroy completely all Armenians living in Turkey..... an end must be put to their existence, however criminal the measures taken may be, and no regard must be paid to either age or sex nor to conscientious scruples.....

End of Quote

That edict included all those ordinary, and extraordinary, breathing lives of whom I spoke I earlier. A million and a half of them--as a result of that order.

I believe there are not many Armenians whose families were not affected by this tragedy. In some cases, whole families became history. In others, only one or two survived.

At the beginning of World War I, there were more than two and a half million Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire; since the genocide, fewer than 100,000 DECLARED Armenians now live in Turkey.

1982 finds Armenians all over the globe. They are where they can be themselves. They live in New York, Boston, Sarasota, and Albuquerque. We are survivors. We have married, had children and we tell them who we are, and they will tell their children who they are. Those 2 million souls do live on, in us.

WE SHALL NEVER FORGET THEM.

Men who live and breathe, have children, and plant flowers in the spring do terrible things to one another, and each time one group of people victimize another group, we need to remember that each victim is in us, and we are in him.

I now read from the Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Church -
from the service virtually unchanged for the last 1700 years.

Again in peace let us beseech the Lord.
For the souls of them that are at rest, let us beseech Christ our
Saviour, that he may reckon them with the just and may save us
by the grace of his mercy.
Almighty Lord our God, save us and have mercy.

The Deacon:

By the holy cross let us beseech the Lord, that he may thereby
deliver us from our sins and may save us by the grace of his mercy.
Almighty Lord, our God, save us and have mercy.

Hymnal music from
Divine Liturgy by organist
closed this section of the
service by us.