



His Eminence Archbishop Hagopian Presents His Easter Message

Around this time, almost 21 centuries ago, Jerusalem was seething. The entire city and its residents were distraught, except for some people, who, with their victorious smiles, were recounting the torture and the horrid crucifixion of that rebel preacher blessed with inexplicable powers called Jesus, who had dared disturb accepted customs, criticize governing authorities, reform fixed laws, and instead of “an eye for an eye” He preached “love your neighbour as yourself.” He solemnly spoke of standing by the poor, the weak, the disabled and those who sinned, and advocated love, solace, peace, and redemption. In the end, through traps, betrayal and treason, they succeeded in getting rid of that presence, who had revealed the truth behind their formalistic and fake rites. In the end, Jesus was cruelly tortured and crucified and later placed in a rock tomb that was sealed with a huge boulder.

The small number of followers that remained were witness to it all. Some were terrified and disillusioned and many were haunted by nightmares. Soon after, they began returning to their villages or small fishing boats.

Mark the Evangelist and particularly Luke the Evangelist recount the events of that turmoil in a small passage. “Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. The stranger asked them, “What are you discussing together as

you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." (Luke 24:13-21)

Luke the Evangelist continues to say that despite the news about Jesus' Resurrection, they remained sceptical, filled with doubt, and fearing persecution, they preferred returning to their ordinary lives in their villages. It is then that the stranger started to explain the Scriptures concerning Jesus and began with Moses and all the Prophets. As they approached their village, the stranger was about to continue his journey when the travellers urged him to spend the night and elaborate his explanations.

Once home, they prepared supper and as they sat at the table, the stranger took the bread, gave thanks and passed the bread around.

Suddenly, because of that familiar movement, they recognized the stranger as their prophet, and he disappeared from their sight.

That same night, filled with hope and energy, they returned to Jerusalem where they found some of Jesus' followers and described what they saw. While they discussed what happened, Jesus reappeared and said, "Peace be with you."

The Resurrection of Jesus is an earthshaking event and in the history of mankind, an original method of divine revelation, through which He captured the attention of people. Resurrection is God's way of inviting us to listen to Him, and by heeding His words, we begin a new life.

As Matthew the Evangelist says, God does not realize Resurrection through a tender, harmonious sunrise but through an intense and derailing earthquake. "There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it." (Matthew 28:1-2)

God jolts us and offers us an invitation to a new life. The Christian faith begins with a great explosion, so we could focus our minds on God.

When the women were making their way to the tomb, they had their own worries Mark the Evangelist recounts, "and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" (Mark 16:3)

Just like we have our own thoughts, preoccupations, plans, memories, dreams, grief and fears, they did too, but God came to put a stop to all of this. During this startling occurrence the women saw God's angel, whose appearance was like lightning. The angel sat on the stone and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said... Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He ... is going ahead of you...'" (Matthew 28:5-7)

Our new life begins when we begin to turn our focus to God, and many of us need an earthquake to shake us, to bring us out of our sleepwalking state, in order for us to listen to God's words and how we should lead our lives.

Just like the travellers to Emmaus, we often go about our way by looking upon our surroundings in an indifferent manner and we don't see who is walking with us. We are often self-absorbed and preoccupied with our unfulfilled dreams, deceptions, misery, and we don't see the daily miracles around us. More often than not, God's intervention is required so lightning could strike our lives, open our minds and enlighten us, just like He opened the eyes of His followers.

Our new life begins when we listen to God's words and act according to His message, just like the women who visited the tomb on the morning of the Resurrection listened to His directions and passed on the good news of the Resurrection, despite the extraordinary events they may have not completely comprehended. Our new life also begins when we understand that our life is a given opportunity for us to take hold of that treasure, to live life by valuing its meaning and every moment.

The journey to Emmaus is also our journey. When we go about our lives concentrating on ourselves, we become temporary and mortal creatures. However, when we carry with us our faith in Jesus, our lives are blessed and we will find ourselves on the road to eternity. "Do not be afraid, for I am with you."

Happy Easter!

Prayerfully,
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