



**THE MESSAGE OF BLESSING OF
HIS HOLINESS KAREKIN II
SUPREME PATRIARCH AND CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS
ON THE OCCASION OF THE TENTH ASSEMBLY OF
THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES**

“And he said to them, “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”

(St. Luke 24:25-26)

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

We give glory to the Lord, who with His presence brings light to the human heart.

A little while ago we heard the gospel story of the miracle on the road to Emmaus. It tells how the Risen Lord, mere hours after his resurrection, appeared to two disciples and spoke with them. The travelers were so despondent that they didn't even recognize their Master. Yet the Lord, through His words and personal presence, removed their doubt, left them with a deeper feeling of hope and faith—and a deeper awareness of God's saving power.

They returned to Jerusalem and shared their joy with Christ's followers, thereby dispelling the unbelief and dejection of their circle that was soon to become the Church. That room in Jerusalem and the disciples therein represent the Church in her full and glorious unity. It is the fulfillment of the words of the Risen Lord:

“You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and bear fruit, so that your fruit should abide and whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.

.... This I command you, to love one another.” (St. John 15:16-17)

And some two thousand years later, we too—each in our own way—continue that mission. The words of St. John surely resonate with this gathering as well. For today we are likewise in one place and of one heart, gathered as the branches of the true Grapevine. Each of us is different and unique, but we are shoots from the same root. Our mutual faith in Christ—truly, our love for the Lord—is what unites us. This example of unity is what all participants in the ecumenical movement are called to demonstrate, first and foremost. We must strive above all for a spiritual unity: a unity of faith and service; a unity of witness throughout the world in the name of Jesus Christ and His Holy Church.

Speaking in the name of Christ, acting with the presence of Christ—forthrightly and without hesitation—is what that witness entails. Certainly our words and actions must be judicious, sober, responsible—even delicate in certain circumstances. But to minimize or obscure the Author of our unity is to cover the “Light shining on a hill.” It is to hide the only source of illumination that can pierce the darkness of the world, and bring clarity of vision to mankind.

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The truth is that the pre-Biblical pagan cultures did not care very much for the poor of the world. But it is also becoming clear that society in the modern era has very little use or concern for the poor among us—whether they are poor in material needs or poor in spirit.

By contrast, it was Jesus who blessed the poor. It was Jesus who offered up his brief life and ministry to bring comfort to the poor in spirit, and relief for the material and spiritual impoverishment of mankind. It was Jesus, extending the legacy of the Hebrew prophets, who made these values a central concern for the entire human family—indeed, who made such concerns the very measure of our humanity.

But our Lord was equally clear that any “solution” to the problem of poverty—and all human ills—would only come through Christ himself: through our acknowledgement of Christ’s dominion, our grateful acceptance of his sacrifice and resurrection, and our whole-hearted reply to his loving invitation to “Follow me.”

With this understanding, our Lord established the church, to be the vessel of Christ’s “nearness” in the world. And that is why the theme of this assembly is more imperative today than ever before: “God of Life, lead us to justice and peace, by first and foremost strengthening the mission of Christ’s Holy Church.”

The great problems of the world today are above all problems of human distance from God; often a willful distance—a prideful resistance to the very idea of a loving and righteous Supreme Being. That resistance, that distance from God, is nothing less than a license to ignore the rights of one’s fellow man, and to consider any means of reaching a goal as tolerable.

Christianity teaches us another way—leads us along a different road: the road to Emmaus. That miracle reminds us that, even in our moments of apparent defeat, Christ is with us. He is not distant, but eternally near. He is with us even when we don’t recognize him. He sustains us, feeding our spirits and opening our minds. And in doing so, Christ inspires us to share what we have with others in a spirit of generosity, brotherhood and hope.

Through Christ, we are encouraged to undertake a personal outreach to others—to regard our fellow human beings, without exception, in the full dignity and holiness of their personhood. That is the unique mission of Christ’s Holy Church, which cannot be replicated by the administrative state or substituted with technology. As the theme of this meeting suggests, strengthening that mission is the first and foremost step on a journey whose destination is a world where justice and peace prevail. And to arrive there, we must be willing—in all humility—to be led by the God of Life.

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He leads us to a world of many dimensions: a “house of many mansions,” where many different people, from many different walks of life, can find a true home. But the foundations of that home, its bedrock values, are clear.

First among the foundational values is morality. There are many things to say about morality, but this above all: that it is learned by example; and that this example must come from the Church. We—as leaders of the Church—must exemplify the moral virtues we wish to see in the world around us.

As the Church, our moral preaching must be an extension of Christ's example of love and compassion. It must not discriminate or set conditions, but rather welcome all in a spirit of charity. We cannot promise that it will result in a society entirely without wounds; but it will promote a society with the spiritual tools to heal those wounds.

A second essential value is education. Education builds respect towards one's fellow man; a mutual acceptance and cooperation among peoples. It provides previously unavailable opportunities, and thereby cuts across divisions between classes, and ethnic, religious and social groups. Genuine education allows us to emerge from the dark cave of superstition, violence, hatred and prejudice: the eternal enemies of a flourishing human life.

At one time, education was a gift for the fortunate few. But the 20th century brought about a transformation with the introduction of universal education in large parts of the world. It was a truly momentous turn, related to the Christian insight into the moral equality of all human beings, and their God-given ability to comprehend truth.

We today must not allow the Church to be driven out of the modern educational establishments. We must uphold the Church's identity as one of the great educational institutions in the history of mankind. We must inhabit the halls of higher learning; become conversant in the great fields of human inquiry. And we must guide the fruits of learning—especially technology—in the direction of humane ends, which elevate and enrich human life, and do not demean or destroy it.

A third value—closely related to morality and education—is the fundamental human association of the family. Today we are troubled to observe not only a desertion of societal support for the family, but also a distortion of the very idea of what constitutes the family. Here again, the understanding of the Biblical heritage and 2,000 years of Christian civilization is very clear. The solemn union of man and woman; the interplay of generations involving children, parents, and grandparents: these are expressions of the true diversity within humankind. The family, in the deepest sense, realizes our hope that human beings, in their diversity, can come together in a productive and loving union.

Our faith endorses the family as the “school” to teach us the fullness of our humanity. We should note that this understanding is consonant with the received wisdom of other civilizations and other traditional faiths.

As Christians, of course, we have a unique stake in the promotion of family life—for it gives us some of our deepest insights into our relationship with God. What does the Holy Family mean to a person who has never witnessed a traditional family? How will we understand the mystery of the Christ-child, if childbirth is considered a burden rather than a blessing of hope? What is the meaning of the prayer to “Our Father”—Hayr Mer, in our mother tongue—for a society where fatherhood is de-valued?

Most of all, the kind of sacrifice that is so often a part of family life is fully in accord with the Christian call to die to one's self and to care for the weak. As the family declines, so too does the Church. Thus, our role in forming and defending strong, kind, loving families is vital.

Finally, what about the value of peace itself? Peace remains an elusive reality in our world. We believe that this realization is the most terrible and demoralizing surprise of the 21st century. At the turn of the Third Christian Millennium, we all had more positive, more hopeful expectations for the world, than what we see around us today.

Especially painful are the civil unrest, intolerable violence and active warfare being carried out in the Middle East—especially in Syria and Egypt. Surely our hearts go out to all the people suffering under lawlessness and violence. We pray for all families regardless of ethnicity, faith, creed or race; and we implore God to bring an end to all conflicts, so that reason and dialogue can prevail.

As members of the Church, we are deeply affected by the terrible suffering of our brothers and sisters in Christ. In recent years, and with increasing frequency, we have seen them singled out for persecution by extremists – at times even because of indifference of the authorities - precisely because they are Christians. Since the time of the Apostles, these Christian communities—among them our fellow Armenians—have lived productively and at peace throughout the Middle East, contributing to their adopted lands. Christians have historically played the role of peacemakers in the region. And their treatment is a test of justice in their respective countries: a test of whether basic human rights are honored by the local authorities and the majority populations. The Christians succumbing to violence in the Middle East are the witnesses of martyrdom in our own day. It is up to us, in our native countries and through this Assembly, to unite our voices and actions to prevent similar acts of violence and contribute to the establishment of peace in the region.

This reality speaks with special force to the Armenians. The torments of our Christian brethren are all too familiar to our people. In the year 2015, Armenians in Armenia, Nagorno-Karabagh, and in every nation on earth will commemorate a tragic anniversary – one hundred years since the greatest cataclysm of our history: the Genocide of the Armenians, committed by Ottoman Turkey. Four generations have passed since 1915; but the memory of our time of horror remains alive. And the quest for justice—if only through the simple act of official recognition and universal condemnation—will not die.

This should stand as a reminder that the violence and misery in our world today will cast dark shadows into the 22nd century and beyond. We are grateful that in recent years the WCC, our sister Churches, and more than twenty countries have made official statements recognizing and condemning the Armenian Genocide. But imagine the pain and misery that could have been spared—not only for our people, but for the later victims of genocides in Europe, Cambodia, and Africa—if the world of a century ago had taken action to prevent the atrocities, massacres and ethnic cleansings of 1915.

As churches, we must protest the crimes going on before the eyes of the world today. And we must speak forcefully for a universal doctrine of human rights: whether it involves the fight for life itself in Syria and Egypt; or whether it is a struggle for the right to self-determination of a free people in the Republic of Nagorno-Karabagh. We must assert, with one voice, that the violation of these basic rights will not be tolerated in any part of the world; because without a foundation of justice and human rights, the peace we seek will be only temporary and fleeting.

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The enduring values we have outlined here are the fruit of Christianity's 2,000-year history. They are part of the legacy we, as the Church, have inherited. Promoting them within society is part of the mission to which we have been called. We must undertake that mission with the greatest humility, however we must also be confident that these same human values have always found their highest expression in Jesus Christ, and in the movement He established.

Indeed, we look around the world and see confusion and sorrow everywhere. In our own fearful moments, we may imagine that the world of today would barely even recognize Christ Himself. But here again, the miracle at Emmaus instructs and consoles us. For we know that the travelers on the road to Emmaus were likewise confused and despondent. They, too, did not recognize the Lord. But when the Risen Christ approached them—shared their journey and answered their concerns—his words and presence made sense of the world for them.

That is a message we must embrace as the church—as the Body of Christ on earth. Our quest to promote justice and peace—and every human good—begins by meeting our people on the road. We must approach them with compassion; share their journey; help them with their burdens. In pursuing the loftiest of goals, we should plant our feet firmly on the ground, viewing our people eye-to-eye. Speaking with them in the name of Jesus Christ. Acting among them with the presence of Jesus Christ.

Today, it gladdens and consoles our heart to join in the prayer of this assembly, imploring God to strengthen this hopeful mission of Christ's Holy Church. May that spirit always embolden our hearts and indeed lead us to true peace and true justice, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, the Savior of the world.

Thank you again for the invitation to address this assembly to share the warm fellowship of fraternal love in Christ. May His grace, love, and peace be with you, and with all mankind. Amen.