

# Prophets, Primates and Prime Ministers

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*But when (Elisha) could no longer see (Elijah), he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. 2 Kings 2: 12-13*

Today is the Feast of Elijah, the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday that we messed up chanting the name of our new Primate, Fr. Daniel. We ask for your understanding and patience. After all, for twenty-eight years, longer than most of our altar servers have been alive, Khajag Srpazan was our Primate; and now he's not. Transitions are difficult. And if merely saying Fr. Daniel is the new Primate is a tough change, just think what challenges lie ahead for our new Primate and all of us as we adjust to moving forward together with new vision and leadership. Well fortunately, today's Feast of Elijah brings us timely wisdom about navigating transitions in a Godly way; be they from prophet to prophet, primate to primate, or Prime Minister to Prime Minister as is currently taking place in Armenia.

When we meet Elijah in today's reading, he is at the end of his long leadership of the people of God and is passing on the mantle to his student Elisha. And whenever a long-serving leader moves on, be they prophet, primate or prime minister, there is much anxiety as the people are caught between an unknown future and a known past. Long serving leaders bring comfort and security in their steady tenure, and deep down, nobody likes change. On the other hand, long serving leaders can become stagnant; with the same people, ideas and problems slowing growth and fostering disengagement. Leaders who step in during times of transition often find themselves like the prophet Elisha, thrust in the middle of two great forces, the need for continuity with the past and the need to adapt to a changed present and future.

Like all good stories, the Bible doesn't just tell you how difficult it was for Elisha to be torn between these two positions, it shows you that he was torn. Elisha take his garment, his mantle, and tears it in two. Elisha is literally torn. Part of him is clinging to the past and the stable leadership of Elijah, and part of him is trying to brave the new future with himself in the lead. Times like these are disorienting for leaders and their people; no one is fully sure of who they are anymore, because part of us is over here and part over there, one foot in the past and one leaning to an uncertain future.

Well, Elijah and Elisha end up bringing their people through transition, and in the process, give us many lessons on Godly leadership. For today though, we will focus on a key aspect of Godly leadership through transition that Elisha exemplified; namely, that what is next, starts with a commitment to what is now. In other words, if you want to be a good prophet, primate or prime minister tomorrow, you must start by being a good person today. This sounds too simple, but it isn't. In times of transition, fraught with anxiety and expectations, there is a great temptation for leaders and followers alike to lower themselves today, in order to rise to leadership tomorrow. Let me share an example. Several months ago, Fr. Daniel was encouraged by others to run for Primate. Out of respect for Khajag Srpazan, he refused. When Khajag Srpazan withdrew his candidacy ten days before the election, we were all at a loss. Several of us who thought Fr. Daniel was now the best candidate for Primate, approached him to see if he wanted us to 'campaign' on his behalf. He said no, people know who I am, let's leave it to the Holy Spirit. Our new Primate knew that what is next, starts with what is now. If you come to leadership by pushing and pulling, your leadership will be defined by pushing and pulling. If you come to leadership by respect for your predecessor and faith in God, your leadership will be defined as such.

Elisha also had the wisdom to know that what is next, starts with what is now. Elisha also had a chance, in fact three chances to break away from his predecessor Elijah. All three times Elisha elects to respect his mentor and stay by his side. Though he was surely insecure about what was to come and overwhelmed by expectation, Elisha stayed true to his best self, his people and his God, knowing that how you come to leadership, defines most how you will lead.

And what is true for prophets, primates and prime minister, is true also for priests, parents and parishioners. The greatest thing we can do to our tomorrow is to be faithful to what is today. After we go home today, I hope we can reflect on this simple wisdom in all the communities we are a part of that may be going through change. As we do, let us recall the story of the prophet Elisha, who took up the mantle, the calling of his master Elijah in a Godly and humble way. In this world of constant change we are always in transition, we are always torn in two between a past we cling to and an uncertain future. Let us remember that what is next is always connected to what is now, and that we must be faithful in the here and now, the humble service of the only time given us, before God might surprise us and trust us with greater things to come, now and always; amen.