

The Last Word

But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. (Jn 21:25)

These words end the Gospel of John which we have read from today. They reflect a central point of the Bible, as well as the ritual and theology of the Armenian Church; namely that words cannot totally capture and define the greatness of God. For we are creatures and God is God, so anything we say and express will fall infinitely short. Thus the starting point of all true worship, including tonight, is to recall that God is sacred, is a mystery, and mysteries can't be grasped, we can only be grasped by them. I pray that tonight we are grasped by the loving grace of our great, living God.

However, in tonight's worship commemorating the Armenian Genocide, we see that the opposite can also be true. Not only is it hard to find words to describe the great goodness of God, it is also very hard to put into words the great badness of evil. We Armenians have come up against this problem whenever we refer to the greatest evil which has ever befallen us, the Armenian Genocide whose 104th anniversary we commemorate today.

As many of you know, words literally failed to describe this event. A new word actually had to be invented, by Jewish human rights lawyer Raphael Lemkin, to describe the past massacres of Armenians, as well as the Jewish massacres which were then in progress. Genocide was that word. Inventing that word, however, did not solve the difficulty of describing our genocide, which persists to this day. Turkey and their allies, including of course the United States, are well aware of the power and consequences of using the word Genocide, and therefore refuse to use it. We Armenians even have difficulty describing this great evil which befell us. I remember well, four years ago when we debated what words to use on our genocide monument. We had an email debate of nearly 50 messages. Should it be 1.5 million Armenians murdered, or massacred, slaughtered or perished or were they simply victims? Was this done by the Turks, the Kurds, the Ottoman Empire or the Ottoman Government? What about the good Turks and Kurds who saved Armenians and now are our allies in recognition?

There is not, and there never will be an easy way to talk about the Armenian Genocide, because this was a great and complex evil that is beyond normal words to describe. That's why perhaps the most accurate way to describe the Armenian Genocide is the original term used in our language Mets Yeghern. "Great Calamity" is how this term is usually translated but Yeghern is even more open and mysterious; an affliction so evil, that we can't quite yet put words to it. Like the God of great goodness, this event of great evil is sacred, it is a mystery, and should not be touched lightly. You cannot grasp the genocide and get easily over it, you can only be grasped by it and-by the grace of God- get through it.

Put another way, when it comes to expressing great love or overcoming great hate, words fall short. Thankfully, Scripture has many words to guide us when our own words fall short, and Christ is the ultimate Word of God, who "became flesh and dwelt among us, (Jn 1:14)" to show us—where words fall short—how God can transform the darkest evil into renewed life. In doing so, God's Word, Jesus, gives us the final word to describe the Mets Yeghern the "great calamity" that befell us. That word is not victim, neither murdered nor massacred—it is martyred. Martyr is the Greek word for "witness." Our ancestors who perished in the Armenian Genocide were witnesses to, participants in, the betrayal and torture of Christ, and ultimately his resurrection; the same events of Holy Week and Easter that we witnessed to in these past days.

And so today these 104 years later, on the fourth Saints day of the Holy Martyrs of the Armenian Genocide, let us turn again to God's Word where our words fail. "Do not let your hearts be troubled," Jesus says in today's reading as if talking to our Genocide Martyrs, "Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will also come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also...I am the way, and the truth, and the life. (Jn 14:1-6)."

And so today, "let not our hearts be troubled," that our ancestors were violently taken from their homes on this Earth. Let us be 100% confident- as many of them were-in the ultimate Word of God that "In my Father's house there are many

dwelling places.” Our sainted relatives lived a terrible, but ultimately beautiful mystery beyond words-that great suffering and death are real, but that new life in Christ is the greatest reality still. This Easter season, we follow our ancestors in placing our hope in the Resurrected Lord. Where words fail or are misused, we remain confident and joyful that Jesus will always have the last word on the Great Calamity of the Armenian Genocide, now and always and unto the ages of ages amen.