

When Words Fail

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 are the very last words of the Gospel of John, in today's assigned reading we also read from the very first words. Both the beginning and the end of John's Gospel 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 today, is to recall that God is sacred. God is a mystery, and mysteries can't be grasped, we can only be grasped by them. I pray that today and every day we learn to be further grasped by the loving grace of our great, living God.

In just a few minutes, however, as we proceed in prayer to our Genocide memorial, we run into the same problem of finding words to describe this great evil. That is, not only is it hard to find words to describe the great goodness of God, it is also hard to put into words the great badness of evil. We Armenians come up against this problem whenever we refer to the greatest evil which has ever befallen us, the Armenian Genocide whose 107th anniversary we commemorate today.

As many of you know, words literally failed to describe this event. Winston Churchill, when referring to the Jewish Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide called it 'the Crime Without A Name.' The name for such horrible inhumanity to a group of other people was so bad, so beyond imagination that a new word had to be invented. Genocide was that word, invented in 1944 by Jewish human rights lawyer, Raphael Lemkin. Inventing that word, however, did not solve the difficulty of describing our genocide, which persists to this day. Turkey refuses to name it, and many of its allies still follow suit. Even we Armenians have difficulty describing this great evil which befell us. Julia Dadekian's book *Silent Genocide*, that we will be hearing about after church, reflects this difficulty. The Armenian Genocide is 'Silent' because of its lack of recognition, but also because words fail the survivors of such trauma to come to terms with what happened to them.

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 more open-ended; suggesting this event was so evil, that we can't quite yet define it. Like our God of great goodness, our trial of great evil is in some ways 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.

But, praise God, our Scriptures give us words to express great love or overcome great hate when our own words fall short. Today's Gospel reading reminds us that Christ himself 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 just last week.

And so today these 107 years later, on the seventh 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 another of today's reading as if talking to our Genocide Martyrs and us survivors, "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)." So "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 all ways, even the darkest ones, lead home to God. Our sainted relatives lived through unspeakable suffering, but that suffering is redeemed by a more powerful Easter mystery beyond words. Somehow, some way, the reality of suffering and death have been

conquered by the greater reality of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ. This Easter season, let us follow our ancestors in placing our faith, our hope and our love in this central mystery of our faith and our lives. For no matter if words fail or are misused, we hold firmly to the promise 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.