

Works of Your Hands

O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. -Is 64:8

This week the leadership team of our church finished up our annual report, sent it yesterday via email and today has made copies available in the narthex for those without email access. We believe deeply in transparency and shared stewardship of this gift we hold in common at St. Hagop, so we urge you to read and participate in any way you can. As you participate in this our annual ritual of stewardship, you will hear about how we did with finances and how we dealt with pandemic in this extraordinary year. You will be asked next Sunday to choose servant leaders to guide our church forward in the coming years.

In a word, what we will be doing this week into next Sunday will be a lot of looking at ourselves in the mirror as a church community. Our wonderful treasurer, David Kazarian, will have us look into the 'church as business' mirror. 'We had this much income and that much expense, we have this much means to accomplish our mission and goals next year.' That's an important mirror. Our terrific PC Chair, Louise Yardumian will have us look into the 'church as organization' mirror. 'We coordinated and implemented these ministries and events at our church.' That's an important mirror.

But there is one most powerful mirror that we look into each Sunday, the mirror or the Holy Scriptures, which holds before us the most important reflection of our church because it shows us who we are in the light of God. Today's scripture reading from the prophet Isaiah is no exception, it actually gives us a perfect image to reflect on this Sunday before our annual parish assembly, reminding us who is in control and what we are made for. It is written, 'O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.'

What a great reminder for all of us stewards and leaders of St. Hagop Armenian Church, especially at this time of year. After hundreds of hours putting together an annual report, the finances, the nominees for church office, the organizational reports, we leaders of this church could very easily get the impression that it is by our efforts that we have achieved what we've achieved this past year-this past decade-in this blessed church community. But today's scripture shows us who is in charge. It tells us that not one of us is a self-made man or woman, and so neither, by extension is this church. We are God-made men and women, and God has called forth and formed this community and church. This is all gift, all grace. For from the beginning, our Scriptures remind us, God is the potter and we are the clay. Indeed, in Old Armenian, the very same word used for 'potter' in today's passage, is used in Genesis for the creation of man ստեղծիչ/steghtsich. God literally sculpted men and women from the clay of the ground and breathed life in to us. No matter who you are and what you have accomplished, Catholicos, donor, priest, godfather, builder; all Glory is to God alone. He is the potter, we are clay.

But this is not to say that, as humble clay, we are to be passive in our lives and the lives of this community. We actually have been delegated a grand choice on which all good things depend. Our choice as clay is whether we allow ourselves to be continuously formed and reformed by the potter, or whether we dry up, become rigid and break. That seems like an easy choice on paper, but in practice, it is just so hard to put our lives in God's hands rather than our own. We prefer to hold tight to our few accomplishments as self-made men, women and churches, and keep our distance from a full trust in the will of God for our lives and our community. But today we see that God is not satisfied with this.

The mirror of today's Scriptures does not portray us as gold, bricks, a temple or any finished product; we are clay. We are clay, because we are always in God's hands, and if we allow him, he is always forming us and changing us. He isn't satisfied with us being a good guy, who goes to church and doesn't do anyone harm. He wants us to be like His Son Jesus Christ; a work of art that is formed over a lifetime and beyond. He's teaching us; He's disciplining us. He puts people and circumstances in our lives that help to mold us. Even when bad things happen to us or those around us, even during pandemic and war, God is using these sharp edges to change us and shape us.

So as we reflect on who we are today in worship, and who we are as a community in our upcoming parish assembly, let us remember that God is not done with each of us or this community. From the very beginning, he continues to form us.

And though, as clay, we are no very attractive by ourselves, we become so in the hands of God. For when the hands of the potter touch us, the thoughts of the potter form us, and the plan of the potter is worked out through us, it is then that we become master works of our creator and a perfect reflection of his love and grace, now and always amen.