

ISSN 2471-4704
Volume 4/ Number 2
2018

ՀԱՆՁՐԱԲԱՆ
THE
REASURY

The Abundant Life
Code Blue

Addicts, Active
Shooters and the
Armenian Church

ARMENIAN
WOMEN
BUILDING
FAITH

THE TREASURY

FEATURES

2 ARMENIAN WOMEN BUILDING FAITH

Armenian women have demonstrated their faith over the centuries in many powerful ways. Meet six influential Armenian women whose rich faith manifested in the construction of buildings inside and out of the boundaries of historic Siunik.

By Dr. Roberta Ervine

8 ADDICTS, ACTIVE SHOOTERS AND THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

While crisis situations continue to afflict our families and assault our neighborhoods, the Body of Christ needs to become that unique community of humility, patience, and love that God has called us to be to bring healing within our church walls and beyond.

By V. Rev. Fr. Daniel Findikyan

12 ABUNDANT LIFE

One of the most profound promises Jesus gave to his followers was that we could experience "abundant life." Not every Christian agrees as to what abundant life is, and for some it seems idealistic, out of reach, and inconceivable. What did Jesus mean when he said he came that we "may have life, and have it abundantly?"

By Dn. Eric Vozzy

16 CODE BLUE

Is the House of Medicine, armed with its 21st century technology, high-priced potions and white-washed OR's sufficiently equipped to defeat its most formidable foe, Death. Meet one physician whose journey from medical school through residency has taught some valuable lessons on the gift of healing.

By Dr. Ari Nalbandian

DEPARTMENTS

7 WORDS AND *THE WAY*

ընտանիք/*undaneek*/family

15 PASTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Matchmaker, Matchmaker, Make Me a Match

20 BADARAK BYTES

Lift Up Your Doors



OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF
THE FELLOWSHIP OF ST. VOSKI

Volume 4 Number 2



Front Cover: Gndevank - www.findarmenia.com
Front Inside Cover: Poppy Flower - Ajamian photo archive

Page 2: Fragment of the wall of Ani Cathedral - www.treasury.am
Page 3: Vanevan Monastery - Unidentified source
Page 4: Khotakeratz Monastery - www.armmonuments.am
Page 4: Gndevank - property of Dr. Roberta Ervine
Page 5: Vorodnavank - www.commons.wikimedia.org
Page 5: Vahanavank - www.flickr.com
Page 6: Ani Cathedral - www.treasury.am
Page 6: Ani Cathedral - www.csolsqs.com
Page 8: Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Fresno - Unidentified source
Page 10 - 11: Prayer - www.americamagazine.org
Page 12: Precious Stones - www.blog.beadsofcambay.com
Page 14: Glass of Water - www.brands4friends.de
Page 15: Together - Unidentified source
Page 16 - 17: Code Blue - by Hasmik Ajamian
Page 17: Keeping Away Death - sculpted by Julian Hoke Harris; www.imgur.com
Page 18 - 19: Ascension - www.kilikia.weebly.com
Page 20: The Transfer of Gifts - Property of the Armenian Diocese of America (Eastern)

Back Inside Cover: Pastoral Staff - Property of the Armenian Diocese of America (Eastern)
Back Cover: Ararat Valley - www.ayastour.com

PUBLISHER:

The Fellowship of
St. Voski

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Dr. André Markarian

EDITORIAL BOARD

Rev. Fr. Ghevond Ajamian

Dr. Roberta Ervine

Dn. Eric Vozzy

PUBLICATION DESIGNER

Hasmik Ajamian

EDITORIAL OFFICE:

P.O. Box 377

Sutton, MA 01590

All Bible verses are from the
1805 Zohrab Bible (Armenian)
or the Revised Standard
Version (English, RSV)
unless otherwise specified.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF ST. VOSKI

Nor Voskiank/**Նոր Ոսկեանք** is a fellowship of men and women working toward the revival and restoration of Armenian Orthodox theology and life within the Armenian Church at large. The fellowship is named after St. Voski and his companions (the Voskians) who were a group of Christian martyrs and monastics from the first century, many of whom who were students of St. Thaddeus. According to tradition, St. Thaddeus ordained as their leader a priest called Chrysos (Greek for “gold,” Armenian “voski”), and thereafter the group came to be known as the Voskians.

In the spirit of the Voskians, Nor Voskiank seeks to support the cultivation of a thriving, united, worldwide Armenian Christian community through prayer, fellowship, and the publication of practical educational resources covering the entire breadth of Christian life as lived, interpreted and testified to by the Armenian Church since ancient times. The Treasury/**Գանձարան** is published quarterly and subscriptions are available by request. To contact us or donate, please visit us at

www.StVoski.org

Nor Voskiank is a tax-exempt not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization that depends entirely on your generous support for its ministry. For a one-year subscription to *The Treasury*, please send a tax-deductible gift of \$30 payable to Fellowship of St. Voski, P.O. Box 377, Sutton MA 01590. Bulk subscriptions also available by request. Every issue of *The Treasury* is available to read free of charge on our website to all interested. You can also visit us on Facebook at Fellowship of St. Voski.

ISSN 2471-4704

ARMENIAN WOMEN BUILDING FAITH

by Dr. Roberta Ervine



There are so many directions one could take the topic of Armenian Women Building Faith.

There are as many ways to approach this topic as there are places and times in which Armenian women have lived as Christians.

For Armenian women, as for Armenians in general, faith has never been about mental assent to a set of propositions. Faith is not something that one believes with the head.

For Armenian women faith has not been something one practices on Sundays, on major holidays, or when in church, maybe with some bleeding over into other areas of life. Nor has faith ever been a matter of personal devotion in the privacy of one's home, although that is part of it.

No, for Armenians faith was and is one with life. It has to be lived, experienced viscerally, and felt with the whole heart. After all, Christian faith is a realization of what incarnation implies. Christian faith is a full integration of the divine and the human in interaction with the circumstances of the world in which it is lived. Faith is not a one-way street; faith shapes our world, certainly, but the world also shapes our faith and plays an essential role in how we express that faith.

Of course a woman can show her faith in any walk of life, at any place, in any time. So a person can express her faith through family life, politics, social activism, music, the

arts, athletics, the military; anything, really, that is part of a woman's interaction with the world, anywhere that a positive difference waits to be made. Some women, like the ones who will be briefly described below, chose to express their faith in buildings.

The six women whom we are going to look at in this article were all wealthy women, or women with power, or both. Sometimes they were also women of great tragedy as well. But they were fully integrated women. They understood that faith and money, faith and power are not really in different categories. After all, faith and money operated symbiotically in each of these women. These women themselves became the living space where faith and money, faith and power, joined to create a new, incarnate force for good. These influential women taught their children and grandchildren, their husbands, their daughters-in-law, their cousins and their neighbors what it means to know that faith inspires money to act and money enables faith to express itself. Not just their own faith, but other people's faith as well.

It is especially important for us to know these women and their work because we today do not think in that integrated way; certainly not automatically. Instead, we view money and faith as inhabiting two separate boxes. We may consciously choose to move some money into the faith box, when called upon or inspired to do so, but we don't think

of money and faith as being in the same category, much less as symbiotic energies. Many of us do not even consider them worthy to be mentioned in the same breath. So to see that Armenian women handled their resources in ways that allowed their faith to express itself in forms that were tangible, undeniable, lasting, and satisfying to both body and soul is very inspiring.

Faith is not faith without manifestation, and for these women money was the natural vehicle of that manifestation. Their faith demanded that it be so.

The six women we are going to describe briefly here were all members of the princely house in Armenia's eastern province of Siunik. Their names were Mariam, Shoushan, Sophia, Shahandukht the Elder, Shahandukht the Younger, and Kataranide. Their stories were lovingly recorded by the historian Stepanos Orbelian, who was bishop of Siunik in the second half of the thirteenth century. Each one was a builder in her own right, over and above her collaborations with husband or sons. Each woman built at least one faith structure that is still in existence today, a millennium after her death.

The land of Siunik wraps around Lake Sevan. Intensely mountainous, Siunik shades into Artsakh on the east and into Vaspurakan on the west. As its inhabitants sometimes reminded the catholicoses of Echmiadzin, Siunik was the most ancient cradle of Armenian Christianity. Its nobility were fierce, faithful, tough, independent and politically astute, not to say wily. The region has produced many of Armenia's most notable thinkers, and is home to some of the country's most spectacular scenery, as well as to many of Armenia's most famous monuments.

MARIAM

Mariam Bagratuni, who lived in the second half of the ninth century, was the daughter of King Ashot I, founder of the Armenian Bagratuni kingdom, and sister to king Smbat I. She joined the princely house of Siunik when she married Vasak Gabur.

Mariam and her husband didn't have much time together. At a very young age, she was left a widow. A monk named Mashdots Eghivardetsi, knowing Mariam's desire to devote her life, power and fortune to God, suggested that she make the island in Lake Sevan into a monastic center.

She did, building there not one but two churches: the smaller one dedicated to the Holy Apostles and the larger to the Holy Mother of God. When her royal father came to visit Mariam and see her work, he endowed her churches with income from land in his own territory. Today Sevan's island is a peninsula, and the configuration of buildings there has changed, but Mariam's presence is still felt and seen there.

At the same time that she had the churches at Sevan going up, making it possible for a community to grow there, Mariam was also involved in another long-term project, building a monastery called Shoghaka. It is recorded that she paid a substantial sum just for the land the monastery would stand on, not counting the buildings.

It's easy to understand why, with her kind of energy, Mariam's brother King Smbat I appointed her to run the monastery of Vanevan, as well. He himself had built Vanevan on the southern shore of Lake Sevan. Mariam oversaw that project too, until she had to flee from Muslim invaders. With her sons she escaped to Sevan. It was safer on the island, but not safe enough. When the invaders also overran the island, she and her sons fled at night by boat to a more inaccessible part of the mainland. Mariam died there. Her sons couldn't bear the thought of burying her anywhere else than in one of her monasteries. So they embalmed her body and preserved it until they were able to take her remains to Shoghaka and lay them to rest. While



Shoghaka is presently a ruin and in an endangered location, the Armenian government included it on a 2007 list of important sites to be renovated. Sevan, on the other hand, is a flourishing pilgrimage site and home to the Vaskenian Seminary, while Vanevan is also in active use.

SHOUSHAN

Two generations after Mariam, there was Shoushan Siunetsi. Her husband built a beautiful church at Khotakerats Vank. After he died, she took comfort in visiting his church. Then an earthquake destroyed it. Shoushan didn't merely mourn; she rebuilt. Her church was bigger and better than her husband's original structure; after all, it now had to express not only his faith but hers as well. In fact, she renovated the whole monastic complex, giving it a big enough endowment that the monks would never need to stop their prayer and worship in order to fundraise. The monastery later fell into great disrepair, but it has recently been restored. Shoushan built it to house five altars, and modestly hoped that the monks would do three requiem services a year for her, her husband, and their children.

It's a good thing Shoushan was tough. Like Mariam before her, an invasion forced her to flee her home. Taking her daughter-in-law Sofia and a group of five other women, she reached the safety of Ernjak fortress— also built by a woman according to tradition. Ultimately the fortress fell, and the women were carried away to prison together with Sofia's infant son, Shoushan's beloved grandchild. Shoushan never went home again; she died in prison. So did the baby. Her church was restored in the thirteenth century, and has undergone restoration again in recent years. The evidence of her faith lives on.



Khotakeratz Monastery (Խոտակերտացի վանք)

SOFIA

The daughter of Prince Grigor-Derenik Ardzruni, Sofia was the sister of King Gagik III, founder of the Kingdom of Vaspuragan. She joined the house of Siunik when she married Shoushan's son, Smbat. Bereaved and on her own after the death of her son and her mother-in-law in captivity, young Sofia spent more years in another prison in Azerbaijan.



Gndevank (Գնդեվանք)

When she finally returned home, she saw her home region with new eyes. One of its beautiful, curving valleys looked to her like a giant ring; an inscription tells how, following the fanciful imagery, she built a monastery intentionally siting it in an area known for its healing hermits and for a plethora of saints' relics. Sofia described her monastery, Gndevank, as "the jewel in the ring," perhaps making a pun on the name of the monastery's most famous abbot, whose surname was Gnduni.

The tradition of building faith had passed from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law. Although Gndevank fell on hard times, it was renovated more than once and it continues to function today.

SHAHANDUKHT THE ELDER

Shahandukht was wife and mother to Siunik princes. Her most important building project was put in place in the year 1000. At the edge of a river gorge not far from Sisian stood an ancient church said to have been founded in the fourth

century by Krikor Loosavorich and famed for its healings. Shahandukht built at this pilgrimage spot a second church, dedicated to St. Stephen the Protomartyr. In so doing, she created the kernel of Vorodnavank, endowing it with income bearing property and adding to it other monastic structures. Following in his mother's footsteps, Shahandukht's son later built a third church there.

Shahandukht had no idea at the time that she was building a home for what, more than three centuries later, would become the most prestigious and influential line of late medieval Armenian thinkers. Arguably the most famous and prolific scion of that lineage was Gregory of Datev, who gained his name from the ancient monastery of Datev where he was head of studies for many years. Datev, too, had benefited from Shahandukht's generosity. Datev is a functioning monastery at present, and Vorodnavank is a beloved pilgrimage site.



Vorodnavank (Որոճնավանք)

SHAHANDUKHT THE YOUNGER

Shahandukht's granddaughter was named after her. The younger Shahandukht was the daughter of the king of Caucasian Albania, and she married Krikor I of Siunik. The couple had no children, so Krikor named his wife's brother, Senekerim, as his successor.

Knowing that since she was childless her future would be spent alone, Shahandukht collaborated with her sister Kata to build the Holy Mother of God church and mausoleum at Vahanavank. An inscription also credits



Vahanavank (Վահանավանք)

them with the building of the churches of the Holy Resurrection, St. Stephen and Holy Zion. After Prince Grigor died, the sisters both became nuns at Vahanavank. This did not mean that Shahandukht retired fully, however. She retained the authority to affirm real estate gifts made to Datev, and when her brother died, she took over supervision of all building projects in the province.

Vahanavank was largely restored in the 1970's, and further restorations were carried out in 2006-2009.

KATARANIDE

Last but not least of the six women builders of Siunik is Kataranide, a princess who originated in Siunik but moved west into Anatolia when she married prince Gagik Bagratuni. Although she lived a large part of her life outside her home province, Kataranide retained the womanly tradition of faith expression through building.

She lived in Ani, the famous Bagratid capital city and power center of all things Armenian – “Ani of the thousand churches.” When her brother-in-law King Smbat II died and her husband Gagik became King Gagik I, Kataranide took over her late brother-in-law's project to create a great and impressive cathedral fit for the capital of a flourishing kingdom. She hired the famous architect Drtad, freshly returned from his glittering success restoring the dome of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. (The big deal was that the massive dome has no interior supports; Drtad's restoration was a tour de force of mathematical precision.)



Together Kataranide and Drtad created the gigantic cathedral church of the Theotokos, which served as the center of the Armenian catholikosate for several generations. Of course the huge silver cross that once surmounted the dome is gone; so is the gigantic crystal chandelier that Smbat brought from India before he died. Yet the cathedral's adventurous interior design and exquisite workmanship continue to impress even today, a thousand years after the structure was built and despite damage from three earthquakes and several centuries of complete neglect.

In fact, the ruins of Kataranide's built expression of faith now dominate the desolate landscape where Ani once stood. Although it has not yet been possible to restore the cathedral, the faith it represented remains. Kataranide's statement about who she was as an Armenian Christian and who her people were in relationship to God, still stands. And that statement is still true.

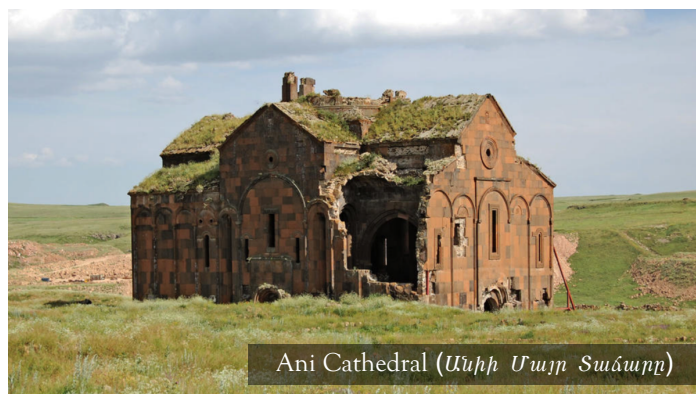
These six Armenian women, like so many others before and since, built, endowed and devoted their life energy to the institutions that embodied their faith. They made it possible for other people to express their faith in liturgy, teaching, writing, preaching, prayer, healing and the arts. But what about now?

The Armenian women builders of Siunik's princely dynasty are inspirational, to be sure. They are also a challenge, even though none of us is likely to become royalty and the chances of anyone reading this attaining wealth and power on a princely scale are slim.

The Siunik women teach us today the exact same things

they taught their contemporaries. They teach us by example that whatever we have becomes the substance of our faith. Whatever we are, whatever we possess is a tool in the hands of faith. We may like our particular set of tools or we may not; we may find them deficient or worry that other people will think them insufficient. We may gripe and complain that we don't have as many tools as the next person or that we have not got as rich an array of them as we would like. We may feel that we can't do anything until we have the perfect tool set – whatever that might be. Nonetheless, the whole complex configuration of useful things we as humans are born with, learn and otherwise acquire over our lifetime, for our own and others' benefit – money, goods and real estate, education, skills, insight, personal qualities, intelligence both intellectual and emotional, curiosity, compassion, creativity – are all tools, and nothing but tools. What we build and create with them matters. Whom we feed, house, clothe, teach, uplift, lead and support with them matters. Otherwise, how is anyone ever going to know that we belong heart, soul and mind to the benevolent God? How else would anyone know that we follow Christ, who spent his earthly life making people's lives better and, ultimately making it possible for everyone everywhere to have the best life possible?

The royal women of Siunik would ask us, what are we doing with the tools we have? And in our doing, what are we teaching our students, our children and grandchildren, our colleagues, friends and neighbors, our in-laws about the permanence of faith, and how faith looks?



Roberta Ervine, PhD, is Professor of Armenian Christian Studies at St. Nersess Armenian Seminary.

Adapted from a presentation made to the AGBU-sponsored Young Professionals' Urban Retreat, held in New York City in February, 2018

FAMILY

ընտանիք = undaneek

by Rev. Fr. Ghevond Ajamian

Family is the bedrock and foundation of society. Humans are social beings and the first people we interact with when we come into this world are members of our family. Of course, there are those who are born and do not have parents or siblings or “family members,” but those who surround them become family members through their care and love. Naturally, some family members are kinder and gentler than others, but what actually determines who is a family member?

We all have different ways of determining who is in our family. There are those who may not be related to us by blood or marriage, but we consider them family or call them cousin, uncle, aunt, grandma, grandpa, brother or sister. They take on the role of family members because of their love and dedication to us. They are so close to us and involved in our life that it is impossible to think of them as anything other than family.

Some have large families, some have small families, some are distant and others are close. Some are well organized and there are some which are called “dysfunctional.” We all have different ways of considering people as our family members. The English word *family* is related to the word *familiar* because our family (members) are *familiar* to us. That is to say, people who are considered family members are familiar in our lives and those who are familiar in our lives, thus, become family.

Interestingly, the Armenian word for family is *ընտանիք/undaneek*, a word composed from two Armenian words: *ըն/unt* which means “under, with” and *տանիք/daneek* which means “roof.” Thus, the Armenian sense of the word for family means anyone who lives under the same roof. This is one reason why Armenians, especially in the old countries, have no problem living with three, four or

five generations under the same roof (in the same home). But this does not mean that family ends at the edge of a roof. Rather, that roof is extended and therefore cannot be just physical.

Well then, how do we determine what is our roof, and thus, who is part of our family? Christ answers this question for us. When told that his mother and brothers were waiting outside and wanted to see him, Jesus responded saying, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it” (Luke 8:21).

If someone wants to be a member of Christ’s family, that is to say, if someone wants to be a Christian, he or she must put God’s words into practice, especially in their own lives. It is not good enough to be a “Christian” on Sundays, holidays or when there is a baptism, wedding or funeral. Our family connection to Christ does not end at the doors of the church but extends throughout the entire universe.

Likewise, a family does not end when the father leaves the house in the morning for work or when the mother drops the children off at school. A family is not defined by physical boundaries and a family’s love is not defined by physical boundaries either. Families do not only exist in a home or on certain days of the year, but transcend time and space.

At Christ’s ascension, he gave his disciples (his family) one last command. That command was to make His family, His *ընտանիք*, larger and to include the entire world, when He said “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). This is the same command we are given: to make the entire world His and our family. May we continue to grow our *ընտանիք* and treat our fellow faithful as true brothers and sisters in Christ.

ADDICTS, ACTIVE SHOOTERS & THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

by Very Rev. Fr. Daniel Findikyan

It wasn't long ago that if someone in an Armenian Church hall in America whispered a phrase like "drug addiction," "mental illness," "teenage pregnancy," or "suicide," it was met with stunned disbelief, followed by a grateful sigh. "Thank God," we used to assure ourselves, "such things don't happen to us Armenians." With our strong family bonds, old-world values, and dogged insistence on education and achievement, we relegated such personal tragedies to the category of "contemporary societal issues" and lamented them at arm's length.

Times have certainly changed. At a recent gathering of clergy from Armenian Church parishes across our Diocese, every single priest spoke like a battle-scarred veteran about such traumas that are afflicting their church communities. Grey-haired Der Hayrs approaching retirement cried out alongside the rookies who are still on their priestly honeymoons, pleading for guidance and training in how to help good Armenian people in their parishes who find themselves floundering in the fires of living hell—young and old; men and women; high school dropouts and university professors, recent immigrants, fourth-generation Americans and others in whose veins not a drop of Armenian blood flows; native speakers of English, Armenian, Russian, Turkish, Spanish and other languages. "They didn't teach us this in Seminary," more than one priest lamented.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

To be sure, our church's leadership has begun to give added attention to these and other "contemporary issues" both in seminary curricula and in occasional seminars and gatherings like the one just mentioned, even if a well-conceived, ongoing, mandatory program of continuing professional education for every priest of our diocese remains as yet unrealized. We have much to do.

And yet no matter how many training sessions we organize on opioid addiction, or how many courses we add to the seminary curriculum on the societal causes of teenage angst and apathy, it would be naïve and foolhardy of us to think that the church alone will resolve these problems, least of all our tiny Armenian Church and our precious few clergy. The "contemporary issues" are many. They are diverse and each one has complex root causes. As a church, our goal cannot be to turn our pastors into psychologists, social workers and addiction counselors. But neither may we wring our hands and stand by impatiently while we wait for the experts to respond.

Today many professionals advocate a collaborative, holistic approach to treating addiction, depression, and other maladies. So the Armenian Church, like all churches, needs to take its place alongside medical professionals,

mental health therapists, social workers and others. While our clergy learn how to recognize when someone in crisis requires more specialized attention, referring them to the various professionals that can more effectively help them, we in the church need to provide the care that should spring from our uniquely Christian convictions. In these times of addiction, active shooters and anxiety, what the Armenian Church needs to do above all *is to be the Church*. St. Paul encourages the Christians of Ephesus “to lead a life worthy of the *calling to which you have been called*, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...for building up the Body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:1-3, 12).

THE BODY OF CHRIST

As long as we consider our Armenian Church to be a *church*, we are obliged to act on the “calling to which we have been called.” That means that first and foremost we must aspire truly to be *the Body of Christ*. We need to become that unique community of “humility and gentleness,” of “patience” and “love” that God has called us to be. At every level, from Holy Etchmiadzin to the Diocese in New York, and most importantly in our individual church parishes, we have a divine mandate to make of ourselves guilds of blind compassion, unconditional love, and selfless service to all. That is what our Lord did and what he has privileged his church to do. It is what God has entrusted to us. And those are the divine qualities that inspired a burly, hard-headed Armenian king named Drtad to dedicate himself and his subjects to Jesus Christ more than 1700 years ago.

ISOLATION

One of the alarming outcomes of the recent clergy gathering was the unanimous observation by our priests that the people in their communities who are suffering with addiction, emotional crises, family upheavals, legal predicaments and other ordeals don’t seek out the church but stay away from it. Many are overcome with shame for mistakes they have made, or because they just don’t look good. Others steer clear of Sunday worship and other parish activities because they fear being judged or becoming the object of coffee-hour banter, habits that are all too common among us Armenians. Still other Armenian

families are stunned in disbelief that their Ivy League son has been arrested for drug possession; or that their teenage daughter is pregnant; or that a spouse has suffered a nervous breakdown; or that they have had to file for bankruptcy, or that their child has come out. And as a result they shun the Armenian Church out of a sense of self-preservation, to protect whatever dignity they have left.

The upshot is tragic on both sides. Our church parishes suffer from even further attrition than they are already experiencing. Rather than attracting new members like a magnet and growing, our parishes find themselves effectively repelling people. The very wounded souls who would most benefit from genuine companionship, prayer, and a shoulder to cry on instead become further isolated and detached. It is surely no coincidence that the vast majority of men who have shot up schools, churches, shopping centers and movie theaters in recent years were described as “loners” and “outcasts.” Psychologists tell us that many mental illnesses manifest themselves in anti-social tendencies. The resulting isolation not only detaches them from healthy human relationships, it often further fuels the root causes of their illness, compounding their misery.

I am hardly qualified to peer into the brains of the men who have gunned down hundreds of American children, students, concert-goers, shoppers and worshippers in recent years, and it is surely unwise to speculate about the sociopathic disorders that drove each one to commit such

We have a divine
mandate to make of
ourselves guilds of
blind compassion,
unconditional love,
and selfless service
to all.

unthinkable horrors. Still, I cannot help but wonder if there was ever a moment in the perilous path that led any of these loners to violence, at which point some human intervention might have derailed his steady descent toward mass murder?

For one man who almost became a mass shooter there was. Aaron Stark was the victim of a rough childhood bristling with domestic violence, poverty, and relentless bullying at school. Alone, depressed and suicidal, he started collecting guns and planning a spectacular suicide in which he intended to kill many people. “I was extremely suicidal one evening, and a friend of mine, without having any idea what was going on and what state I was in, invited me over for a party,” Stark said tearfully in a recent television interview.* “She had baked me a blueberry-peach pie, and I got there, and everybody had the pie, and it was all for me.” A simple act of compassion defused a ticking time bomb. “That literally saved my life that night,” he said. “I wasn’t going to survive that night if that hadn’t happened.”

STEPPING IN

I imagine that some people that are driven to violence are the victims of sudden, overpowering impulses or heinous psychotic conditions for which there is no probable prevention or intervention. And yet if even one of the murderous loners of recent years was susceptible to a simple act of human kindness by someone like Aaron Stark’s pie-baking friend, precious lives could have been spared. With mass shootings now a weekly occurrence throughout the cities and towns of the U.S., it is chilling to contemplate how many deserted, tormented men are currently marching on that perilous path toward eventual death and destruction.

But even if they are not at risk for mass violence, countless men, women and children in our communities are carrying massive psychological, emotional, and other burdens. Agonizing in seclusion and pain, they too are becoming loners and outcasts, starving for a compassionate ear, a smile, maybe a loaf of choreg, and meaningful, loving relationships.

AGENTS OF CHRIST’S HEALING

We in the Armenian Church are obliged to *be the Church*, to be the *Body of Christ* for these people. Of course we pray for those who are suffering and we must always pray more and



better. But God does not answer prayers by sprinkling invisible blessings on us like magic dust falling down from heaven. God’s help comes always in the person of Christ, the Son of God, *and in the Body of Christ*. We, the Armenian Church are that Body. God has given us the privilege to be the agents of God’s healing in this brutally damaged, ferocious world. Each of us who dares enter the Armenian Church must be ready to reach out to “the poor...the captives...the blind...and the oppressed” (Luke 4:18). If we children of the Armenian Church are going to “lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called,” we must be committed to extricate ourselves from our routines, break away from our cliques, wrest ourselves from our busyness, unchain ourselves from our petty prejudices, chip away at our egos, break out of our pride, and stifle our pointless quarrels and quibbles.

None of this happens naturally or easily. To be *church* requires the relentless attention, courage and unqualified love of every church member. When the eyes and hearts of our parishes drift away from the precious face of Jesus Christ, we quickly and inevitably begin the slippery-slope slide from *church* to social club, country club, prayer hall, 501.3.c. organization, patriotic union, or ethnic museum. Each of these is noble in its own right, but none is the *Body of Christ*. None can be the Body of Christ. None is charged by the Creator with bringing the love and soothing hope of our Lord Jesus Christ to God’s people. If the Armenian Church relinquishes the sacred mission that has been exclusively entrusted to her, no one else is going to take up the slack—neither our political parties, nor our compatriotic unions, nor the government of Armenia, nor its embassies,



nor our benevolent organizations, nor our lobbyists in Washington, nor our dance groups, museums, intellectuals, or journalists. They all have their work to do.

And we have ours. In our age of anxiety, there is much to do, and that work is at the pulsing heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His Church among the People of Armenia. It is good work, blessed work, and it is the privilege not only of the clergy, but of each one of us, clergy, men, women, and especially the youth, who must bring to the church's mission and daily life their singular vitality and creativity. Our mission is to make our parishes "safe zones" where our people (and all people) are preemptively embraced in love, like the Father who ran and kissed his Prodigal Son before the boy even had a chance to apologize for his debauchery. We are to create communities where we recognize human frailty and suffering as tragic and inevitable features of life in a fallen world; where, from that vantage point, we support one another, we hold each other up when needed, not criticizing or judging, but rather forgiving one another and compensating for our mutual faults and failings. Our Lord invites us to push back against the natural inclination to let our church communities deteriorate into inward-looking, narrow-minded, xenophobic clubs, elevating them instead into heavenly embassies, where God's love radiates in tangible, visible actions.

Can we achieve such a lofty goal? Is it even possible? Our saintly ancestors who compiled and transmitted our holy *Badarak* to us certainly thought so. From beginning to end, its prayers and hymns challenge us to "commit ourselves and one another to the almighty Lord God" in union with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who "has been

revealed among us" and indeed "is seated right here." If we attend to it thoughtfully and honestly, the *Badarak* dares us to receive and to channel "the divine, sanctifying power of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," in Holy Communion with God and with one another, "for the *salvation of the world* and life for ourselves."

BABY STEPS

Even the most miniscule but sincere gesture of love generates massive power when it is offered in the powerful name of Jesus Christ. "It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade," the Lord assures us (Mark 4:31-32).

This means that "the salvation of the world" begins at coffee hour. This Sunday, make the effort to break out of your routine. Scan the crowd and identify the stranger, the loner, the outcast, the disheveled one, the hypocrite, the loudmouth. Walk up to the woman you usually try to avoid and offer a few kind words. Dare to dip beneath the surface of polite, coffee-hour chit-chat. Underneath everyone's cursory "I'm fine," hides a murky realm of fear, pain, loneliness, and sometimes denial. If you press gently, some people will let you in to their inner darkness, hoping that you might reflect a beam of light and hope. Yes, you possess within yourself a vast store of love and healing power in spite of—or perhaps, *as a result of* your own wounds and doubts. That life-giving energy was planted in you by God's Holy Spirit, whether or not you perceive it or even believe it. God's miraculous healing works both ways. When we summon the courage to bring ourselves to the service of others, the Spirit of Christ, who "blows where he chooses" [John 3:8], breathes life into them and into us. And so the Armenian Church strengthens and swells *as church*. May our precious Armenian Church parishes generate gale-force winds of the Holy Spirit, drawing into their loving embrace all those that are battered by the storms of this world.

V. Rev. Fr. Daniel Findikyan is Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America.

* As reported by Michael Kranz in *Business Insider-UK*. Accessed at <http://www.businessinsider.com/father-didnt-go-through-with-school-shooting-because-he-didnt-have-a-gun-2018-2?r=UK&IR=T>



ABUNDANT LIFE

by Dn. Eric Vozzy

“**T**here has to be more to life than this.” It’s not uncommon to wonder if there is something more to life than what appears on the surface. We get stuck in a routine that includes work, family, parish life, and free time, often reflecting on whether or not we spent our time wisely, whether or not we are really living the quality of life that is meant for us. If we listen closely to the inner conviction which whispers something is lacking in our life, we realize it’s not just something nominal or basic, rather an existence that is bounteous and fulfilling. Unfortunately, for many this reality remains elusive, but in John’s Gospel, in just a few words, Jesus gives us a sense of the quality of life that he promised us and created us to have: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” In Armenian, «ել անուելի եւս ունիցիւ», that is, to have *more life*. What did Jesus have in mind when he referred to “abundant life?” What does it mean to have more life and how can we tap into it?

WHAT ABUNDANT LIFE IS NOT

All of us experience hardship, pain, financial debt, vocational troubles, health problems, and relationship issues, so where is this abundant life of which Jesus speaks?

Perhaps by an abundant life Jesus meant an affluent life, one with an abundance of health, success, and material things such as cars, houses, vacations, and the latest toys. This isn’t far from what a significant number of Christians believe, sometimes referred to as the “Prosperity Gospel,” in which God wants to bless people with physical health and material wealth. After all, God is a beneficent God, so why wouldn’t he want us to prosper and have good things as the result of our faith. The scope of this article is not to critique this false version of the Gospel, but to point out that this common interpretation of “abundant life” is not what Jesus promised. More life does not mean more stuff. A life full of material things not only often proves to be unsatisfying and a source of more problems, but it is discriminatory toward the poor, whom Jesus promised will *always* be with us (Mark 14:7).

Furthermore, a physical and material version of abundant life completely undermines holy figures such as St. Anthony the Great (c. 251-365), the father of desert monasticism who, compelled by Matthew 19:21, lived in a cave in the Egyptian wilderness (see *The Treasury* V4N1 pp6-11); and St. Simeon the Stylite (c. 388-459) who, compelled by the Beatitudes, lived on and ministered from a pillar 60 feet high, with a platform about six feet square

for 28 years enduring the Syrian desert's elements; and many other saints and martyrs whose lives are deeply respected by the Armenian Church for their simplicity, suffering, self-denial, and poverty, a complete inversion of the paradigm of what is considered to be successful, healthy, and affluent according to today's standards. It is clear from even the most abbreviated survey of the lives of the saints or a cursory reading of Scripture that Christian life and faith involves degrees of suffering (Hebrews 11:35-38), persecution (II Timothy 3:12), and tribulation (Acts 14:22).

If abundant life doesn't mean economic success and physical well-being, perhaps Jesus was referring not to this life, in which extremely vile circumstances are possible, but rather to the afterlife when we spend eternity with him. This is also not what Jesus means when he promises abundant life, as wonderful as our afterlife with him will be. Eternal life is not just a state of being after one passes away, but the quality of God's life shared with us and experienced by us in the present. In John 17:3 we understand eternal life as *knowledge of God* through Jesus Christ. Lifting his eyes to heaven, Jesus prays to the Father: "And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Instead of adhering to popular interpretations such as these, let's look at a broader context to enlighten us as to what Jesus meant by abundant life.

ABUNDANT LIFE IN SCRIPTURE AND LITURGY

Jesus specifically referred to abundant life in the Gospel of John, but the reality of abundant life can be found all throughout Scripture. Jesus preached abundant life every time he spoke of the Kingdom of God, when he taught us to amass treasures in heaven, and when he referred to eternal life. St. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians prays for the Church to know "the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the *immeasurable greatness* of his power for us who believe" (Ephesians 1:18-19). Also from the same letter, St. Paul essentially talks about abundant life in his own words as he prays for us "to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be *filled with all the fullness of God*" (Ephesians 3:19).

In the famous twenty-third Psalm, David, a shepherd-boy turned king, reflects on the Lord as a shepherd figure. The opening verse is all too familiar: "The Lord is my

shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures." Jesus' promise of abundant life is preceded by his parable of the shepherd and the sheep, perhaps recalling David's Psalm. Although unclear to his listeners, Jesus' message is clear to us today. The shepherd knows and calls his sheep by name, and the sheep know and will respond to only the shepherd's voice. Jesus further explains his illustration of the shepherd and the sheepfold by referring to himself as the door through which the sheep find salvation and the pasture of abundant life, where he feeds his sheep, providing us with safety, security, love, community, guidance, peace, and hope. But before Jesus promised us abundant life, he warned that the "thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." Among the many voices, the false shepherds competing for our attention, offering us counterfeit versions of an abundant life, our Shepherd's voice alone is the one that matters.

The abundant life that Jesus promised has everything to do with knowing and being known by the Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and is available to us right here and now. This understanding between the sheep and the shepherd, the knowledge of God (*Աստուծոյ ճանաչում*), begins with a new birth through baptism into the Church, whose mission is to invite and lead people to encounter and know God through Jesus Christ in the deepest, fullest, most intimate way. But baptism is just the beginning of our path toward abundant life. Such a life is not something arrived at in a moment, but emanates from an invested life of faith, self-denial, love, the Beatitudes, and an ongoing encounter with the living God. This is precisely why we look to the example of St. Antony the Great, St. Simeon the Stylite, and even the Holy Martyrs of the Armenian Genocide, all of whom lived sacrificially for Jesus Christ, and through their knowledge of God, lived an abundant life.

Returning to Psalm 23, David gives us images of nurturing green pastures, walks us through the valley of the shadow of death where there is no fear, and then invites us to pray the words, "You anoint my head with oil, my cup *overflows*." Emanating from his infinite being, abundant life is the overflowing divine life of God dwelling within us. His abundant life is even experienced in our Holy *Badarak*. After we have shared Holy Communion, together the choir and people sing, "We have been *filled* with your good things, O Lord, by tasting of your Body and Blood." The fullness of God Himself fills each morsel of bread and wine, infusing us with His divine life and healing, changing us as much as we follow, trust, love, and allow Jesus to be Lord and to shepherd our lives.



ABUNDANT MEANS OVERFLOWING

Life in abundance means to be filled, overflowing, and spilling over. But overflowing for what and for whom? Where does this abundant life go? It spills outside of our personal desires, individual concerns, private needs, and onto other people who are craving that same abundance of life. By Jesus sharing his abundant life with us, which begins at baptism, which we share in Holy Communion, we become the healers of those around us. The Christian path is a life of service, almsgiving (*nnnpwłnıphw*), and love directed out to others, the result being life in abundance. In the book of Tobit we read, “For almsgiving delivers from death, and it will purge away every sin. Those who perform deeds of charity and of righteousness will have fullness of life” (12:9).

Much of what Jesus taught is counterintuitive, not only to those in first-century Palestine, but also to us today. We live in a “me first” culture in which we primarily tend to our own needs, thereafter we may be ready to help others. But that is not what Jesus taught. We don’t have to wait for our lives, or our parish communities to be in tact or to have ample resources in order to forgive, serve, pour out love, and invite others to experience the person and abundant life of Jesus Christ. Abundant life is within us, the Church, “which is his body, *the fullness of him who fills all in all*” (Ephesians 1:23). The abundant life of Christ dwells in each of us who have been baptized and sealed with the fullness of the Holy Spirit. It is the life of God himself in the person of the Holy Spirit who fills us, and so the source is always available and can never be exhausted.

ABUNDANT LIFE IS AUTHENTIC LIFE

The abundant life is not a pain-free, debt-free, successful, or even a happy life; rather it is a quality of life that only comes through communion with Jesus Christ. Abundant life is what it means to be truly and authentically human, because it is a reflection of our Creator. Anything opposed to abundant life, anything evil or sinful, is the absence of life or existence, a movement toward non-being and death. Anything less than an abundant life through Jesus is living less than what God has intended for us from the very moment of creation, a profane admission that life is empty, banal, and ordinary. We were not created to merely exist in a daily grind with occasional moments of happiness. Jesus wants to fill every aspect, every crevice of our lives with His overflowing life, love, goodness, and healing: every tear we shed, every problem we face, even in the presence of our enemies, God prepares for us a table, as David’s twenty-third Psalm tells us.

Abundant life is the perpetual unfolding and inexhaustible mystery of God and His salvation. A life lived to its fullest, in abundance, is a life in which we are aware of His presence in the mundane, the extravagant, and the tragic. When life is at its lowest, in our gravest of situations, there is abundant life. When it seems there is no hope, there is abundant life. In a world where terrorism and violence are the norm and fear pervades, there is abundant life. When it seems that God is absent and our prayers are unheard, his promise of abundant life stands. Why? Because Christ *himself* is the abundant life for which we seek. Our beloved St. Gregory of Narek affirmed this in his renowned Book of Prayers when he wrote about our Savior, Jesus Christ: “You alone are great and generous in everything. You are the definition of abundant goodness, who pours forth constantly without measure, more than we ask or expect...” (29B).

Deacon Eric Vozzy holds Masters Degrees in Philosophy from Southern Evangelical Seminary and Diaconal Ministry from St. Nersess Armenian Seminary. He works in the Creative Ministries Department of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America.



MATCHMAKER, MATCHMAKER, MAKE ME A MATCH

by Rev. Fr. Hovnan Demerjian

When I was the director of the Armenian Volunteer Corps (AVC) in its early days, I used to get a little miffed when an applicant was obviously volunteering with the ulterior motive of finding a husband or wife. The AVC is so much more than an Armenian match-making service, I thought. Well almost 20 years later, dozens of marriages have resulted from AVC and Birthright Armenian, including my own. Maybe there is nothing wrong with being a match-making service after all.

Match-making work has also followed me into parish life. This year, during Holy Week services, a young female parishioner was home for college break and joined the choir. When the service concluded, she giggled and showed me her private snapchat with her mom and sister. It was a picture she had taken from the choir loft that night of the handful of men present in church; all in their eighties. Caption: "Prospects for an Armenian husband!" Sympathy for this and other young parishioners' plights has erased what little hesitation I had of continuing my match-making work as a priest.

In fact, I would now even go so far as to say that the underlying purpose of any Armenian organization, including our church, is to marry people off. Yes of course I mean marrying Raffi to Rachel and Talene to James in the sacrament of marriage, but this isn't the only way that our church marries people off. The other way is revealed in this season of Pentecost.

To catch a glimpse of the match making work of Pentecost, one must only pay attention to our liturgy and hymns. On Pentecost, you will find that the normal order of *Badarak* is interrupted by the hymn *Aysor Yernayeenkn* (*Այսօր Երկայենքն*), recalling the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles. This hymn will also be familiar if you have attended an Armenian Church wedding recently; it's the first hymn of the ritual proper. Why is *Aysor Yernayeenkn* both a wedding song and a hymn for Pentecost?

Because the Holy Spirit is everywhere and at all times the bond of love; between couples, between God and his disciples

on Pentecost, even between the persons of God's own self. This bond of love between diverse elements also runs through all of God's spectacular creation. All of the complimentary opposites of creation; dark and light, mind and body, man and woman - when married together-reflect the unity in diversity which is the essence of our Triune God. God is truly the great match-maker, and in the Armenian language, this is literally so. Most linguists believe that the Armenian word for God, *Asdvadz*, is cognate with the word *hast[el/ich]* meaning to join.

Pentecost is of course a distinctive historical instance of God's match making with Jesus' chosen Apostles. It is also a general recognition of what is everywhere and always true; that God is the great match-maker and the Holy Spirit is the impetus and bond of His love. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on Thaddeus and Bartholomew which gave them the ability to speak the Gospel of love to the Armenians, to be a matchmaker between the Armenian people and their Lord Jesus Christ. The fruit of this marriage is our enduring Christian heritage which has sustained us through our tumultuous history and binds us together as a church even to this day. Moreover, the love of the Holy Spirit is intensely personal, such that the deepest marriage possible will always be between an individual soul and their creator. In the sublime words of St. Augustine, "Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

In this season of Pentecost, I pray that our church open its doors and that we open our hearts so that the Holy Spirit might continue its great match-making work. For we are all partners in a sacred marriage that began 2000 years ago, when God joined the Armenian people, and all who believe, into a special relationship with Him. I pray also that we not disdain the work of match-making that brings together the young people of our parishes. For in helping to find their earthly soul-mate, we can also reveal to them their heavenly One; now and always, amen.

Rev. Fr. Hovnan Demerjian is the pastor of St. Hagop Armenian Orthodox Church in Pinellas Park, Florida



“Code Blue, 3rd floor West. Code Blue, 3rd floor West.”

When I applied to medical school, I started a new chapter of my life with the grandiose idea that through this profession, I could be a beacon of God’s healing light to the sick. Like our Lord, I too could heal the lame, the blind, the paralyzed, and the lepers. It would be my way of living out His words “whatever you did for the least of my brothers, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). After two years of sitting in a library drowning in textbooks wondering if I would ever get to talk to a real patient, I finally had my chance to step into the clinical world and become God’s weapon against sickness and death.

Early in my third year rotations, I vividly remember my first day on call. There were three things that separated the “on call” from the regulars. First (and my personal favorite), every fourth day I could shed my uncomfortable tie and dress pants and come to the hospital dressed in bright green scrubs and sneakers. Second (and my least favorite), those on call were to stay at the hospital until 9pm and process all new admissions from the Emergency Room. Lastly, those on call were part of the team that responded to the infamous “Code Blue”, the call to save a rapidly dying patient. While I relished shedding my formal attire for glorified hospital pajamas and had the fortitude to begrudgingly endure a few extra hours of page-dodging with the resident I was assigned to work with, I had no idea what to expect for my first code. I sat calmly, trying my best not to look nervous, when suddenly the overhead announcer pronounced the words I

knew would eventually come: “Code Blue, 3rd floor West. Code Blue, 3rd floor West.”

Almost instantly, my resident dropped everything she was doing, and within seconds we were sprinting through the hospital towards the ICU. Under my breath, I prayed frantically “*zkordzus tserats merots, ooghish ara ee mez Der*” (make straight the works of our hands, O Lord) in anticipation of what I was about to be thrust into. From the end of the hallway I could see a flurry of activity in and out of the unfortunate patient in question’s room, with nurses, doctors, and residents racing to save him. In an atmosphere that was simultaneously frantic yet calm, the chief medical resident stood in the eye of the storm, directing the organized chaos that surrounded him. Joining me were my friends who were also on call from other medical teams, and we got in line to perform our rotating 2 minutes of chest compressions. When my turn arrived, I was seized by an intense and narrow focus: hands one on top of the other, palms down, fingers intertwined, dominant hand on the bottom, elbows straight, bend at the waist, push 2 inches deep allowing for full recoil, all timed to the rhythm of “Stayin’ Alive” by the Bee Gees. After almost half an hour of continuous cycles of chest compressions, drugs, and shocks, the chief resident announced the words we had all been waiting for: ROSC (Return of Spontaneous Circulation) achieved! Salutations of a “job well done” were passed out to all involved, and we all returned to our previous tasks almost as quickly as we had assembled for this one.

CODE BLUE

by Dr. Ari Nalbandian

Soon enough, I no longer dreaded the Code Blue. I became a champion chest compressor, and at times even looked forward to the announcement of a code to break the monotony of my day. Even though as a medical student my only job was to do chest compressions, I knew that one day I would graduate from foot soldier to general, using my brain to steer the sinking S.S. Patient out of the storm of death to the shores of life. As a naïve medical student, indoctrinated with the idea that our job was to hold back death, our mortal enemy, I saw the Code Blue as the most dramatic manifestation of this idea: as the patient stood precariously at the edge of the chasm of death, these doctors and nurses heroically took their last stand against the Grim Reaper, even to the point of using their hands to literally squeeze blood through the heart and life into the body.

However, I soon came to see that responding to a cardiac arrest was less like the valiant charge of Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders, and more akin to the futile charge of the Polish cavalry against Nazi tanks. Few of the patients who suffered a cardiac arrest survived, and of those who did, the fruit of our labor was a few more days of ventilator-assisted existence in the ICU before their already deteriorating body inevitably succumbed. In his memoir *When Breath Becomes Air*, Dr. Paul Kalanithi, a promising neurosurgery resident who died of advanced lung cancer at the conclusion of his seventh and final year of training, says "I had started in this career, in part, to pursue death: to

grasp it, to uncloak it, to see it eye-to-eye, unblinking." This was why I had chosen this path as well, but with the added goal of not only uncovering death, but conquering it. Dr. Kalanithi reflected his own relationship with death throughout his short career, both as a doctor and as a patient: "As a resident, my highest ideal was not saving lives—everyone dies eventually—but guiding a patient or family to an understanding of death or illness. In these moments, I acted not, as I most often did, as death's enemy, but as its ambassador" (pp 86-87).

Was not medicine the theatre of humanity's fight to push back death, our Custer's Last Stand writ large against an ancient and feared enemy? How could someone in my profession ever give ground to death, let alone be its ambassador? As Christians, is death something that we must fear and resist at all costs?



As Christians, we have been reassured throughout the centuries that death is something that no longer has any power over us. Every Easter, our choirs gloriously proclaim early in the *Soorp Badarak*,

**Քրիստոս յարեալ ի մեռելոց:
Մահուամբ զմահ կոխեաց եւ
Յարութեամբն իւրով մեզ զկեանս
պարգեւեաց:**

Christ is risen from the dead! Trampling
down death by death and granting us life
through His Resurrection.

In his letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul declares triumphantly, “Death has been swallowed up in victory. Oh Death, where is your victory? Oh death, where is your sting?” (I Cor 15:54-55). Each day in the hospital, I beheld the victory of death as it extinguished life through various means: strokes, heart attacks, car accidents, gunshot wounds, cancer, and a million other ways. I saw the sting it left in the children and spouses of those dragged into the abyss, not to mention the sting it left in me as I bore witness to it all. It seemed disingenuous to tell a grieving family not to fear, for they would behold their loved one at the end of time in a new resurrected body, free of cancer and with wide open coronaries.

Despite this, I drew comfort in the fact that even our Lord recognized the toll of death on His human creatures. In the Gospel of John chapter 11 we read: “When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’ When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her weeping, *he became perturbed and deeply troubled*, and said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to him, ‘Sir, come and see.’ *And Jesus wept*” (John 11:33-35). The creator of the universe, the Ancient of Days, wept at the death of his beloved friend, just as any of us would when someone we love is taken from us. Even though he was the Author of Life, Jesus still felt the emotional toll that physical death imparts on us in this world. Hope in the resurrection does not prevent us from feeling that pain, but give us hope that the anguish we feel now is not the final word. Even Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead, eventually died again leaving his sister Mary grieving once more.





The victory of Christ that St. Paul speaks of in his letter to the Corinthians is an eternal victory. Though our world is fallen and in decay, what we hope for is the renewal that Christ will bring, and has already brought into the world through his own death and resurrection. What about those who would tell us that we are foolish to hope in such a resurrection, as proven by the continuation of physical death we see all around us? To these people St. Paul would say, “If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’. Do not be deceived...What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed....So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body” (I Cor 15:32-45). Christ himself is described by St. Paul as the first-fruits of this resurrection, and the living proof of what we place our hope in: “When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (I Cor 15:54).

Now, as a senior resident in the Emergency Department, I have come to have a much deeper understanding of Dr. Kalanithi’s sentiment towards death and St. Paul’s proclamation of Christ’s victory over it. We as physicians have been entrusted with the divine gift of healing, but even the most advanced technology in the hands of the most competent doctor cannot defeat the inevitability of physical death. Our triumph therefore as physicians lies not only in holding the hands of a dying patient and feeling their pulse return, but also in holding the hands of the families of those whose pulses do not return and guiding them through the painful mystery of death toward the glorious Victory of Christ.

Ari Nalbandian, MD, is a second-year Emergency Medicine resident at UMass Medical Center in Worcester, Massachusetts and serves as sub-deacon at St. Vartanantz Armenian Apostolic Church in Providence, Rhode Island.

LIFT UP YOUR DOORS

by Dn. Michael Sabounjian



**Համբարձէք, իշխանք, զդրունս ձեր ի վեր,
համբարձցին դրունք յաւիտենից, եւ մտցէ
Թագաւոր փառաց:**

**Lift up your doors, O you princes,
Let the everlasting doors be lifted up so that the
King of Glory may enter.**

This is a phrase that we hear every Sunday during one of the most climactic moments of the *Soorp Badarak* called the *վերաբերում* (veraperoom), the procession where the deacon brings the chalice up to the main altar. We hear this phrase within the context of a dialogue between the deacon and the priest, a recitation of the second half of Psalm 24.

Psalm 24 is one of the Psalms of David, and in particular it is a Psalm for war. Now David's relationship to war was very different than that of most kings. His first encounter with war was as a boy when he was put into battle with the Philistine Goliath. Being one third his size, David did not use brawn to defeat Goliath but rather his trust in the Lord led him to victory in an impossible situation. So when David became king, even as his armies grew, his most important assurance of victory was not these armies, who usually still paled in comparison to those of the opponents, but rather he was assured of victory because the King of Glory, the Lord, was fighting for the Israelites. They not only figuratively brought the Lord into battle but would physically carry the Ark of the Covenant, where the Ten Commandments were housed, to face their foes. They knew that by bringing the Lord with them, they would ultimately be able to conquer any enemy whom they encountered. So this psalm offers a dialogue between the enemy behind a walled city and the Israelites trying to enter.

The Israelites proclaim "Lift up your doors, O you princes, let the everlasting doors be lifted up so that the King of Glory may enter." The Israelites are basically telling the enemy army to surrender because they have already lost. The Lord God is fighting for the Israelites so they will not lose. Therefore, their enemies might as well surrender peacefully and lift up the strong doors to the city as high as they can so that the great Lord God may come in. The enemy army replies "Who is this King of Glory, the Lord strong in his power, the Lord mighty in battle." And the Israelites answer "He is the King of Glory" in reference to the Lord God in the Ark of the Covenant.

So why do we use this psalm during the procession of the chalice?

Well, in the same way that the Israelites would process into physical battle with the Ark of the Covenant where God was believed to dwell, we too process into this section of the *Soorp Badarak* with the *Chalice*, where we believe God dwells. So when the priest recites the phrase, "Who is this King of Glory, the Lord of Hosts," the deacon boldly replies "*Մա ինքն է Թագաւոր Փառաց*," that the bread and wine in that chalice is the King of Glory, Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord, who conquered death by his death.

Looking at this psalm from a different perspective, in the same way that the enemy armies lifted up their doors to allow the King of Glory to enter *their city*, similarly, through the reception of Holy Communion we just opened the doors of our lips to allow the King of Glory to enter *our bodies*, to fill our lives, to become united with us in all that we do.

So the question is, now that the King of Glory has entered our city, will we allow him to fight for us?

King David knew that fighting with the Lord at his side would lead to success. And when he went into battle

trusting in the Lord, he was successful. However, in order to put trust in God, David needed to lower himself from being the #1 ruler of Israel to being the second-in-command next to God. He needed to say “Thy will,” not “my will” be done. He needed to stop trying to tell God what God needed to do and start asking God what God wanted from him.

So if we want true, meaningful success in our lives, not worldly success, but the kind of success that permeates the boundary between this life and the next, Christ invites us to make one simple change in our lives. Through Holy Communion, we already are letting the Lord enter our lives in a very real way. But Christ calls us one step further: knowing that God is always with us, Jesus calls us to ask him for the plan of attack for our lives. The only way to do this is by calming ourselves enough to hear his voice. If we are not already in a regular regimen of prayer, a good place to start may be this: before getting your cup of coffee in the morning, ask God one simple question: “Lord, I acknowledge that my life is a gift from you, so what do you call me to do with that gift today?” And after asking, sit in silence for a minute or two. I truly believe that a small change like this can make a big difference in the way we lead our lives. We don’t need to make monumental changes to begin to see God working in very real, dynamic ways. We just need to open ourselves up to God’s plan and let him do his work.

Christ offers guidance to overcome even the most impossible challenges. So as we celebrate the Lord’s Supper every Sunday, let us lift up the doors to our lives and let the King of Glory enter in. Amen.

Deacon Michael Sabounjian is a graduate of the Armenian Church Studies program at St. Nersess Armenian Seminary in New Rochelle, NY and has a Master of Divinity degree from St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary.



Fellowship of St. Voski
P.O. Box 377
Sutton, MA 01590

