**Pressing Forwards**

***12****Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.****13****Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,****14****I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.****15****Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.****16****Only let us hold true to what we have attained.*

***17****Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.****18****For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.****19****Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.****20****But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,****21****who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. (Philippians 3:12-21, ESV)*

On the threshold of this new year, God has called us to look forwards to Jesus, and not backwards at our past. In the peace of the Lord, we present to you today the last sermon in Armenian for this year, hoping that you will turn this last week into one of spiritual renewal for yourselves.

God has always invited humanity to look toward Him. God, through the Law of Moses, has shown that the spiritual walk was the important one – the faith-walk, the faith-based life. God has also aimed to draw His own people’s attention through His prophets towards what was heavenly or Divine. When that didn’t happen, God, through His Son, came to challenge Israel’s Law and law-based lifestyle of the past with a new walk, a new spiritual reality. That new reality was the Holy Spirit led life of salvation through Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus is the future for every believer. Given that, it is appropriate for us to put aside our unspiritual past and to move forwards in and towards our Lord’s will. Again, on the threshold of this new year, God has called us to look forwards to Jesus, and not backwards at our past. Let’s meditate out loud about this call…

Forget what lies behind, let us move forward to what lies ahead. Through the Apostle Paul, God shows us that our life resembles a race. He says, “*straining forward to what lies ahead*.” What is that? He says it is “*the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”*. The things of his past, which were those of sin or immaturity are what he forgets, and he launches forward to what awaits him. He pursues not in a nonchalant way or with a relaxed attitude – he is not out for a stroll; rather, he runs as if he is in an Olympic race. However, he does not want to run alone – he says, “even if you think differently,” that God would reveal the truth of what he was saying. He wants to advance while being likeminded with his fellow believers. He wants the church to imitate him, since he knows that he needs to run with his face always turned to the goal of Christ’s presence.

Paul says that many do not run that way. In fact, they are bound by their personal needs, their earthly cares, and they cannot (or maybe don’t want to) get free of those bondages. Those make a person into an enemy of the Cross of Christ.

Our citizenship (as the church), however, is not like those people. Our progress is toward the Second Coming of Christ. Paul says, in effect, that he does not expect anything from this life. Rather, we wait for the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies to be glorified like His after His resurrection.

Imagine that someone decides to be satisfied with reaching only the halfway point of his or her destination, settling for a hotel on the way. Or let’s pretend that someone is going to run a marathon and being sure that she is the fastest runner in the race, decides to carry her favorite chair on her back for the whole way, and, just out of curiosity, decides to constantly gauge the progress of those behind her (by looking back). She will neither win nor finish those 26 plus miles.

Today, as we find ourselves on the cusp of 2022, let us lower the heavy burdens off our backs, and hand all of them over to our Lord Jesus Christ. Let’s take on His light yoke of love, while following the voice of His Spirit and looking forwards to the challenges to overcome, instead of looking back at or weak moments and mistakes made. Let’s receive forgiveness for our past sins, asking forgiveness from each other if needed, and let’s start the upcoming year with the renewal of Christ.

Instead of looking backwards, let us look forwards and follow Jesus. Happy New Year and may the call of the Lord make us forget everything and draw us forwards, to walk in His will always. May the Lord Bless You, Amen.