**Persevere in Suffering**

***10****You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness,****11****my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me.****12****Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,****13****while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.****14****But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it****15****and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.****16****All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,****17****that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:10-17, ESV)*

 Perseverance is indispensable for a Christian – especially for us Armenians, when we find ourselves suffering, under persecution, or before the specter of genocide. Greetings to you dear brothers and sisters in Christ as we talk today about perseverance. In a few days, it will be April 24th, when 109 years ago, we were subjected as a nation to premeditated, horrible and untold murder, slaughter, forced displacement and fatal exile. That is not the only thing we are commemorating today, however. We need to also remember that once again, at least 100,000 Armenians from our Artsakhi lands have been forcibly displaced, with some being murdered with that same violent spirit by the Satan-inspired enemy as in 1915. I do not want to say that the two events are the same, however, we cannot ignore what the Apostle Paul says about suffering in connection to the above. The Apostle says to Timothy (in the Armenian translation), his protégé:

*“Stay attached to my teaching, my aim in life, my willingness, my faith,*

*my patience, my love and steadfastness, which I showed even in my*

*persecution and sufferings.” (v10 in Armenian)*

 Therefore, today, the question of “what must we do when suffering or under persecution, or even facing death?” is the one we are going to answer. The latter, (the solution) is already in our theme statement. Perseverance is indispensable for a Christian – especially for us Armenians, when we find ourselves suffering, under persecution, or before the specter of genocide. Let’s see, then, how and why the Apostle says the above…

 As we remember our faith-heroes’ lives, we are called to persevere in all suffering. The Apostle Paul was explaining to his student Timothy that there were days coming which were going to be worse than what they were experiencing then. People were going to become even more evil than they were already. They were going to be prouder, loving money even more, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, slanderers, unthankful and with no self-control, and many other horrible things. People were going to progress (sarcastically) from one evil to another. But whatever he was seeing then, Timothy was to remain faithful to Christ. He needed to remember the kinds of hard times that his own teacher (Paul) had gone through. The Apostle had even been stoned and left for dead, but God having saved him. In all of that kind of suffering, Timothy was to persevere in his faith-life.

It was impossible for a Christian to escape persecution or suffering. The world, as much as God had created it, is full of corruption and the demonic, with unbelievers always being spurred on by the latter forces to commit evil acts against Christians. After all, a Christian is a representative of Christ, the devil’s mortal enemy.

The believer’s perseverance (which is Paul’s exhortation to the suffering Christian) was going to come from knowing the Word of God well. Timothy would have the needed patience because he was staying grounded on what he had learned from Paul.

It is not accidental that our grandmothers and grandfathers prayed and sang hymns and sharagans in the deserts. They also, like Paul, stayed steadfast in the faith they had learned and known, in the mercy of Christ. It is not accidental that in history, sometimes Christians escaped death by miracles, and other times they escaped betraying Christ by death. In both cases, the death was not the important thing, but rather Christ. It was the same in the Apostle Paul’s case, since he was already getting ready to be condemned in front of Caesar in Rome. Death was not important – but faithfulness to Jesus ‘til the end was.

The value of a human being is not in his physical life, as much as his influence and works in Christ. Truly a meaningful death is immortality.[[1]](#footnote-1) However, when our souls are for sale to other false gods such as comfort, money or pleasure, it is these latter ones that betray not only our country[[2]](#footnote-2), but Christ Himself, first and foremost. These three caused the surrender of the impregnable fortress of Ani to the enemy in Armenian history. It was those three that have been cause for many, many betrayals, such as Vasag Siuni’s during the Vartanants campaign in the 5th century AD. These false gods are the ones that can lead a people to loss, annihilation, and to disappearance from the world stage. I’m not talking about physical annihilation here – but rather, the spiritual kind, the annihilation of our faith in Christ.

Knowing the Scriptures well helps us to persevere in the troubles of this life. It awakens faith in people. Thus, if you want to persevere despite seeming insurmountable odds or impossible situations, go to the Scriptures, and be inspired from its contents to live with faith, with a prayer-life, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Today, on this Sunday of the Commemoration of the Genocide, I believe that God is inviting us as well to know His Word well, so that even if we experience persecution or find ourselves facing death like the Apostle did, we would be able to withstand the pressure and be faithful witnesses to Christ.

Remember today the example of the faith of your forefathers, starting from the Apostle Paul, who is one of my and your fathers of faith. Then, remember also Gregory the Illuminator, Vartan Mamigonian, and the thousands of martyrs we have had until this latest genocide in Artsakh. Remember them and pray that God will keep you ready to persevere, to endure with faith and to overcome every suffering and persecution.

As we remember our faith-heroes’ lives, we are called to persevere in all suffering. Perseverance is indispensable for a Christian – especially for us Armenians, when we find ourselves suffering, under persecution, or before the specter of genocide.

God bless you all. Amen.

1. A phrase translated from the original Armenian from the historian Yeghishe (5th century) praising a purposeful, knowing, and deliberate martyrdom. The original phrase says, “An unknowing death is death, but a knowing death is immortality.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Primarily Armenia but applicable to all countries of the world. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)