**Restoration Out of Resurrection**

***15****When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”*

*“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”*

*Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”*

***16****Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”*

*He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”*

*Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”*

***17****The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”*

*Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”*

*Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.****18****Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”****19****Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!” (John 21:15-19, ESV)*

 God is ready to restore our lives if we are willing to fully give offer ourselves to Him.

 Greetings dearly beloved as we talk today about restoration. Through Jesus’ resurrection, the possibility of a new life opened up for the world, meaning unbelieving humanity. According to the above episode, however, this new life does not simply come about through God’s bestowal, but with the cooperation of man giving the right answer to the Lord’s invitation. We see that in this conversation between Peter and Jesus. The event took place after the Lord’s resurrection, and it shows us a few important realities, which we will examine below: again, God is ready to lift us out of our difficult or weakened state if we truly are ready to be devoted to him and willing to come out of what we are stuck in. Let’s go into a bit more detail…

 Jesus’ Resurrection opens a new life before us, but we need to be able to follow Him with our whole life, and not just our words. The theme of the Scripture passage is about restoration – and in it we see that Jesus and the apostles-to-be have just finished a breakfast and are sitting around a fire (how quaint, you might say). The scene around the fire is the same as when Peter denied Jesus – he was sitting around a fire (what a coincidence? Maybe not…) Three times, Jesus asks Peter about his love for Himself. On the third time, it seems that Peter finally understood what Jesus was doing. The third time caused Peter to get upset. Why, you might ask? The reason is that the first two times were not deemed enough and were not matching the level that Peter had denied Christ. He needed to affirm His Teacher and Messiah strongly three times in place of the three denials previously. After he did affirm his love for Jesus and heard an invitation to ministry thrice, then he received the foundational and final command, to follow Jesus again. All that took place because Peter had to be fully restored. He had to deal with the consequences of an intense moment of questioning by the Lord for his denials. He also had to deal with his extremely high view of himself. The Lord was showing him the truth about himself – that he was a frail individual, and not as brave as he thought. In the end, we see that the Lord accepts Peter’s confession of faith but reveals to him that there is going to be a price to pay for the faith he expressed in the Lord.

 In the history of the Christian Church, it is important for us to note that believers in the first three centuries especially, had to deal with recurring seasons of persecution for their faith. Sometimes they were arrested, kidnapped, or even sentenced to death. They were often called “atheists” because they did not pay homage to the pagan statues and did not offer sacrifices to the names of the latter. They were considered rebels because they did not bow down before the name of Caesar, nor did they burn incense for him or before him. However, when things got bad, at times, some would deny the Lord Jesus, and sometimes later would come to their senses and realize the error that they committed. Some church leaders would not accept these deniers back, while others accepted them back all too willingly. Jesus, however, accepted Peter, but not without allowing him to feel that he had denied Jesus multiple times.

 What about us? Yes, God is ready to take us back even if we sinned or erred in a moment of weak faith. However, we must know that following Jesus Christ entails paying a price for it. As Armenians, we have paid through the numerous genocides we have undergone and survived throughout history. It was not only in 1915 that we experienced the latter, but also much before that – even before Christ, and at the hands of many invaders into our historic homelands. We have paid the price many times for not giving into atheist and ungodly kingdoms. Whether Persians, Arabs, Mongols, the Tatar and Turkic tribes and their persecutions, or even Russian or Greek kingdoms, and including among the persecutors our current immediate eastern neighbors to Armenia, we have paid the price time and time again. Therefore, just as Peter paid the price for his faith, eventually being crucified upside-down, we also must carry certain crosses, especially our cross of faith, if we want to remain faithful to Jesus our Lord.

 So, in this season of celebrating the Resurrection, it is important that we move forward with a renewed and restored faith. God is ready to restore us if we are willing to come back to Him wholly.

 May God continue to give us a strong trust and faith in Him, that we can remain faithful both as a nation, as the Armenian branch of Christ’s Universal Church, and as individuals.

 May the Lord bless you all. Amen.