

MESSAGE
BY BISHOP HOVAKIM MANUKYAN
12 JULY 1015
TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY
ST YEGICHE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH

Your Eminences and Graces,

Reverend Fathers,

Distinguished Guests,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

It is a profound joy for me to greet you all on this solemn occasion under the arches of this beautiful Church of St. Yegiche, during this solemn Divine Liturgy. I thank you for your words of encouragement and for the trust you put upon me to serve as the new Primate of the Armenian Church in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

I thank His Holiness KAREKIN II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, for calling me to this new ministry. I am grateful to all the clergy and members of the parishes and churches who have shown support and willingness to build the life of our church together. I am thankful to you, dear faithful, for taking part in this Divine Liturgy and for praying with me at this very beginning of our journey together.

In the name of the father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen

“This is my Son, the Beloved, he enjoys my favor. Listen to him” (Mathew 17:5)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today the Armenian Church celebrates the feast of the Holy Transfiguration of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Again we hear the voice of the father: “This is my Son, the Beloved, he enjoys my favor. Listen to him.” The synoptic Gospels tell us that Jesus “took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone” (Mt 17:1). The mountain in the Bible represents a place close to God and an intimate encounter

with Him, a place of prayer where one stands in the presence of the Lord. There, up on the mount, Jesus is revealed to the three disciples transfigured and most radiant. Then Moses and Elijah appear and converse with Him. His face is so resplendent and his robes so white that Peter, awe-struck, wishes to stay there, as if to stop time. Suddenly from on high the voice of the Father resounds, proclaiming Jesus to be his most beloved Son, saying “listen to him” (v. 5).

The heavenly Father told this to these Apostles, and He tells the same to us today: “listen to Jesus, because he is my beloved Son”. As your new Primate, in the context of this inaugural liturgy, my words to you are also the same: let us keep these words in our minds and in our hearts and let us “listen to Jesus.” These are words that God the Father tells to everyone: to me, to you and to everyone.

At this wonderful liturgy, I would like to expand a little more about what this Biblical narrative says to us as ordinary people and faithful and what does it mean to listen to Jesus in the light of the story of the Transfiguration?

One of the great Christian thinkers of our time and a close person to us, the Armenians, Pope Francis identifies two important theological points in the narrative of Transfiguration: ascension to the mountain and descent to the plain. The first theme is the spiritual ascension up the mountain. We ascend the mountain where we encounter God and where we meet Jesus. This is where we receive the blessings and graces of the Holy Transfiguration.

Dear brothers and sisters,

The life of a Christian is an upright journey and ascension to the mountain. To me, personally, this mountain is the Armenian Church and our Christian tradition. This is where we encounter our legacy: St. Gregory the Illuminator, St. Sahak and St. Mesrob, Narekatsi and Shnorhali and many others. This mountain for me is the St. Arakelots, the Holy Apostles Church in Lake Sevan, where I chanted psalms and the bells of Holy Etchmiazin. This mountain is also the ecumenical movement, where we listen to Jesus having the experience of celebrating our faith in unity and diversity.

The second theme is the descent. The mercy of God is abundant and His grace is not limited. We read in the Bible: “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it”? As Christians, having experienced this unique encounter with our rich legacy, and having embraced its sacred values, we are then called to return to the plain where we meet our

brothers and sisters in Christ, who for whatever reason, remain distant from the Church. Our task is also to share these graces with those who are victims of injustice, ignorance, poverty and sickness, both material and spiritual. We are called to bear the fruit of our experience with God to brothers and sisters who find themselves in difficult circumstances and share with them the grace that we have received. This is what the Christian life is all about. It is a mission for the whole Church, for all those who are baptized, for us all: to listen to Jesus and to offer him to others.

Dear friends,

I take this opportunity to thank my dear brothers in Christ for their presence and prayers at this special liturgical celebration. I am happy to greet you all, particularly His Grace the Bishop of London and the primates of our sister Churches. Last time we met it was in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, during the historic event of the canonization of the victims of the Armenian Genocide. Indeed, it is truly a great joy to greet you and our brothers in Christ here. Armenians are not ethnocentric but reach out to others. This is why I hope and pray that we can work better together in facing all the future challenges. As the bishop of the Armenian Church in the UK and Ireland, I welcome you to join this beautiful and luminous upright journey, so that with our united efforts we may be able to share the grace of our Lord and Savior with our people everywhere.

May the Lord keep our people and the Churches in peace; and may He bless all our efforts for the sake of good wholesome life and the vibrancy of our faith, now and forever. Amen.