

THE IMPERATIVE OF A FAITH-SUSTAINED LIFE

(Dialogue with the youth– Number 5)

This year, in my Easter message I emphasized the crucial importance of faith. I based my reflection on the following verse of St. Paul: "***Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess***" (Hebr. 4: 14). As we spiritually prepare ourselves to celebrate the Easter, I would like to share briefly with our youth the following few points:

First, in its general understanding, faith is an inner drive of human being to yearn for, and to have confidence in a reality that is beyond the scope of human life. The human being is a limited creature endowed with a life marked by limitations. Therefore, the desire for a transcendental reality, in order to protect and support him, has been a permanent and salient feature of human existence from its very inception. In the course of history, each religion has identified its own object of faith, which has provided the substance, context and basis of a religion's life, thought and vision. The object of faith could vary from religion to religion; yet faith is a basic necessity. The human being cannot live without some sort of faith.

For Christianity, faith is not a mere attachment to, or close interaction with a supernatural reality; it is a full allegiance, dependence and obedience to God. In fact, God is the source and the cause of human existence and the sustaining power of earthly life in all its forms and expressions. The true faith is a powerful force even if it is "as small as a mustard seed", it can "move the mountain from here to there" (Mt. 17: 20).

Second, the source of our faith is the Triune God who is not a conceptual notion, an abstract idea or an unapproachable and ungraspable essence. God is a living being, both immanent and transcendental, who has revealed Himself to humanity in history. God has revealed and communicated Himself to human beings through Jesus Christ. Therefore, faith for Christianity is of an incarnational nature. In the Nicene creed, which is recited during the eucharistic celebration after the Gospel reading, the basic components and aspects of our faith are clearly defined and articulated.

Indeed, the unique importance of faith has been at the heart of Christ's teachings and miracles: "Your faith has healed you" (Mt. 9: 22) was a major message of Christ's ministry. The healing, empowering, life-giving, reconciling and transforming power of

faith was also dominant in the events pertaining to the early church in the apostolic period.

Third, being Christian does not mean merely knowing about our faith or even witnessing about it. It means keeping firm our faith. This is the message of our Lord Jesus Christ. The church, the mystical body of Christ, constantly reminds her faithful to remain faithful to the Christian faith by responding to its challenges, demands and implications. What does this mean?

a) It means placing the faith at the center of our life by making it the guiding force of our thoughts, of our dreams, of our work. The Apostle says: "We live by faith" (2 Cor. 5: 7). Without faith our life will lose its integrity, its identity and purpose. To what extent faith is a living reality in our lives? To what degree our thoughts, our commitments, our projects, our relations, our friendships are determined and underpinned by faith? Let us think about these questions. Our daily prayer must be: Lord, increase and strengthen our faith. This is how we pray every day in the Armenian Church. Let us always remember what Jesus said to His disciples: "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" (Mt. 21: 21).

b) It means preserving the integrity of our faith. The source of Christian faith is the Bible as taught and interpreted by our church fathers, by saints and theologians. Nowadays, I see a tendency to give pre-eminence to the form rather than to the substance of faith. I see an emerging trend to expose ourselves to the sort of perceptions and norms that are not compatible with biblical teachings and with the traditions of our church. Let us listen to what Christ says: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves: (Mt. 7: 12).

c) It means participating fully and actively in the life and mission of the church. The church is not an institution in the ordinary sense of the word; it is essentially a community of faith. It is, therefore, by participating in the life and witness of the community of faith that we deepen our faith. Believing means belonging to the body of Christ. As Armenian Christians, we must be careful not to follow the kind of erroneous teachings and heterodox practices that reduce the Christian to a self-contained existence. I cannot imagine a genuine Christian life, an authentic expression of Christian faith outside of the community of faith.

d) And finally, keeping firm our faith means translating the faith into work. As the Apostle points out, "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2: 17). Christianity by its very nature and vocation is action-oriented. Reflections, meditation and prayer need to be changed into a quality of action that transforms the life of individual and the community.

We cannot survive in the terrible storm of this world without faith. We cannot maintain our Christ-based identity in this globalized world without faith. We cannot preserve our integrity in the midst of morally and spiritually decaying societies without faith. We must keep firm our faith in Christ. This is a faith sustained by hope and strengthened by love, a faith enriched by spirituality and translated into action. This is the real understanding of Christian faith; this is the kind of faith that we are called to live out and articulate in our individual and community life.

Therefore, we are called to renew our faith in Him who always remains our way, our truth and our life (Jn. 14:6).

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