

**THE MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS ARAM I ON THE OCCASION OF THE
BLESSING OF THE HOLY MURON**

THE HOLY MURON:

A SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

*O Holy Church, be joyful, because today the earth
becomes heaven with your renewal.*

These simple yet mighty words of the hymn once more echo in our hearts on this unique spiritual moment in the life of the Armenian Orthodox Church.

“Be joyful” Armenian Church, because today with the Blessing of the Holy Muron (Holy Chrism) you reaffirm your apostolic origin, orthodox faith, evangelistic witness, spiritual mission and your vision of Christian unity.

“Be joyful” Armenian Church, because today with the mixture of the old with the new Holy Muron^{*}, and with the unification of the Holy Muron of St. Etchmiadzin and the Holy Muron of the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, your unity of faith is renewed and re-affirmed, and you yourself are renewed, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in your very being and mission.

Through this sacramental action not only the church expresses itself fully and authentically, but also it becomes itself in its very nature and vocation as the mystical body of Christ and a God-Given mission of faith. Indeed, “the earth becomes heaven” with this supreme act of the church.

The Holy Muron is not an ordinary material reality used in the church among other materials and objects. It is the indwelling of God in a person. Hence, through the touch of the Holy Muron the human being is reborn, recreated, the old Adam becomes new Adam, the old is destroyed and the new is created and the human being is restored in God’s image. With the anointment of the Holy Muron a human being becomes member of Christ’s Church, and the community of faith is built.

The Holy Muron is a source of holiness and transformation, and a way towards spiritual rebirth. This is not a sheer theological concept. This is how our people believed for centuries.

Through the Holy Muron the Armenian Church has become for our people the fortress of *faith*, the beacon of *hope*, and the fountain of *love*. It became a life-generating reality, serving and witnessing for the divine truth and Gospel values. It was not accidental that

* According to the tradition of the Armenian Church, which is preserved till today, the Holy Muron is prepared with the perfume of forty flowers and herbs, the olive oil and balsamum being the essential ingredients. The preparation of the Holy Muron is a long process and each stage is accompanied with special prayers. Before its blessing the Muron rests forty days on the altar. The blessing of the Muron is one of the privileges of the Catholicos and it takes place normally once in seven years.

in dark days and critical times our people turned to the church to deepen their faith and to transform their hopelessness into hope.

Through the Holy Muron the Armenian Church has preserved its *unity*. Due to historical circumstances Armenians have left their homeland, and have settled in Cilicia and in different parts of the world. Thus, the Armenian Church was constantly challenged to adapt itself to geographical divisions and changing conditions. The Holy Muron kept unshakable the unity of the Armenian Church because through it all Armenians received the same baptism and confirmation, and confessed the same faith.

Through the Holy Muron the Church and the Nation became and remained one *indivisible whole*. It brought together all segments of our people by providing them with the sense of belonging to one church and one nation. The Holy Muron made our people the anointed people of God, a confessing, witnessing and serving community of faith, the living church of Christ.

Through the Holy Muron the *continuity* of the Armenian Church was maintained. For centuries, all the members of our church, without any interruption, have been anointed by the same Muron. It was the same Muron that was continuously renewed, and renewing in turn, the life of our people in all its aspects and manifestations. It was the same Muron that safeguarded and protected our people though the upheavals and vicissitudes of history, securing both the integrity and the continuity of our church and nation.

Through the Holy Muron the Armenian Church was constantly revitalized in its *missionary engagement* and *evangelistic witness*. In fact, so many people anointed by the Holy Muron became active missionaries of the Gospel in and outside the Armenian life for centuries. So many priests, monks, bishops, archbishops, patriarchs and Catholicos, having the anointment of the same Holy Muron, became the committed preachers and the ardent defenders of the Christian faith and values of the Gospel at the expenses of their martyrdom.

And, finally, the Holy Muron became a living source of *renewal*. It released us from our sins, remedied our wounds, and took away our pains. It became the purifying, renewing and transforming power of God in the midst of our history.

This is the 9th Blessing of Holy Muron taking place in Antelias, in this new seat of the centuries-old Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia. We give thanks to God who granted us this joyful occasion to bless the Holy Muron surrounded by His Beatitude Patriarch Mesrob II of Constantinople, the representatives of St. Etchmiadzin and the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and our diocesan archbishops and bishops, and in the presence of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III and His Holiness Zakka Iwas, as well as of so many delegates representing the churches of Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican and Protestant traditions, and international and regional ecumenical organizations and bodies. I greet them all in the spirit of Christian love and fellowship. I also greet the representatives of the President of Lebanon, the Speaker and the Prime Minister, the representative of the President of Armenia, and diplomats representing various countries. I greet with fatherly

love the faithful of our church who have come here from different dioceses and countries to share our spiritual joy and recommit themselves to the witness of the Armenian Church.

We blessed, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Muron of 1700th anniversary of the baptism of the Armenian people. This is, indeed, a unique moment in the contemporary history of our people; a moment of prayer and thanksgiving, of reflection and looking forward with renewed hope and vision. The critical question is posed before us is: What are the implications of 1700th anniversary celebrations for our church today in a world which is radically different from that of yesterday?

I believe that the first challenge of this event is *to turn to God*.

In 301 our people, under the spiritual guidance of St. Gregory the Illuminator, turned to God. One cannot grasp the meaning of our history, the mystery of our survival, the great achievements of this small people without the life-giving power of Christian faith, which became the sustaining power of our existence. Where is our people today, in its 1700 years of pilgrimage of faith? To what extent are we faithful to the covenant we made with God 1700 years ago? Our fathers shed their blood for Christian faith. In a world where decay of moral and spiritual values and marginalization of religious traditions and perceptions are becoming dominant realities, we must re-strengthen our Christian faith by going through a dynamic process of spiritual renewal. This is our calling that is more urgent today than ever. Are we ready to rededicate ourselves to the imperatives and values of the Gospel? Our church reminds us that Christ is our true light against the darkness of new times, our hope in the midst of hopelessness, our justice and peace in a world full of violence and injustice. Let us, therefore, turn to God who became and always remains our truth, our way, and our life. Let us live out the challenges of Christian faith in our daily life. In fact, being Christian is not a mere heritage transmitted to us; it is a quality of life that has its concrete implications.

This Blessing of the Holy Muron is also a call for the *renewal* of the Armenian Church.

In order to help its people to renew themselves, the church itself must undergo a serious process of renewal. Our church cannot be reduced to a mere treasury of spiritual values and traditions. It cannot be considered an institution solely concerned with the survival of the Armenian people in a Diaspora situation. Our church is called to redefine and re-articulate its vocation in a new world context through critical self-assessment. Our church is not only an institution, it is essentially a mission, which transcends its structural manifestations and limitations. Therefore, it must fulfill itself as a missionary reality, by renewing its evangelistic task, diakonic engagement, and educational work.

Our church more than at any time, must become the *church of people*, the church of youth and women, the church of the poor and the oppressed, a church open to all, ready to listen, and to serve all. Our church with its rich culture, theology and spirituality, with its spirit openness, and the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, this centuries-old spiritual center in particular with its unique historical experience, broader perspectives and

ecumenical vision, must become a bridge between the old and the new, between Armenia and the Diaspora, between the East and the West, between nations, cultures and traditions of the world.

I firmly believe that only a renewed church can best serve its people, can take efficiently the Gospel to the world, and can become the strong voice of God in the “wilderness” of the globalized world.

I strongly believe that only a renewed church can become the herald of justice, the promoter of peace, the defender of truth, the voice of the voiceless, the true way leading towards reconciliation and unity.

Spiritual renewal: this is the great challenge before us. Are we ready to take it courageously and responsibly?

Let us pray that this blessed Muron may, in the power of the Holy Spirit, deepen our faith, enlighten our mind and transform our life with the values of the Kingdom.

Let us pray that this blessed Muron give us the grace and courage to become God’s agents for the transformation of humanity and creation.