

## For a quality of life sustained by values

(Dialogue with the youth– Number 2)

In my first dialogue with the youth early this year, I emphasized the vital importance of spirituality for human life. In this second dialogue, I would like to underscore the centrality of *values* that must undergird and orient the life and work, the reflection and action of a human being.

While science deals with the various aspects, dimensions and manifestations of life, it cannot provide proper answers to questions pertaining to the purpose of life. Life comes from God. According to the Bible, which constitutes the basis of our Christian faith, God is the Creator of life both in its rational and irrational dimensions (Gen. 1: 1-27). The Bible clearly states that God has created human beings in a special way by endowing them with "His image" (Gen. 1: 27) and giving them a special vocation within the created order. What does this mean?

First, the "*image of God*" must not be understood literally. Basically it means rationality, the ability to take decisions. It means moral consciousness, the ability to choose between bad and good. It also means the privilege of entering into communion with God. The "image of God" is, therefore, the unique mark of a human being. It differentiates humans from the other creatures.

Second, human beings have also been granted by God with a *special mission* to be His representative in this world, the guardian of His household, the steward of His creation (Gen. 1: 28). What a distinctive privilege; what a blessing given to humanity!

These God-given privileges have concrete implications:

a) The human beings should live their lives in total *obedience* to the Creator. Their entire life and work should be sustained by obedient and humble response to God for His gift of life.

b) Life is not the *possession* of human beings; it belongs to God and must be directed towards God. Human beings must live their lives with this profound awareness and strong commitment.

c) This awareness generates *responsibility* vis-a-vis life and God, the source and the owner of our life. We must live our life in a way that pleases God. We must enrich our life with the kinds of deeds and thoughts that clearly articulate the sacredness of life and our faithfulness to this God-given vocation.

d) With this responsibility comes *accountability*. As stewards of God's creation, we are accountable to Him. The time for accountability will not come only at the end of our earthly existence, on the day of final judgment. We should be ready to give account for our life and deeds each day of our worldly life.

Hence, human life must be strongly supported by those values that give quality and purpose to human existence and allow human beings to fulfill their God-given vocation. Without values human life will lose its quality, its proper meaning and importance. What are these values that must govern our personal and community life?

1) ***Spiritual values***. Humans are not only physical beings. They are essentially spiritual beings. Their existence is not merely determined by physical factors and concerns but also by spiritual feelings and goals. There is something in human beings that goes beyond their physical existence in time and space. All religions depict in different ways, this transcendental element which constitutes the specificity of human creatures and their essential identity. Values, such as, pre-eminence of non-material values, drive for transcendence, centrality of the divine in human life, etc. are fundamental. The role of the church is precisely to form our children and youth with these spiritual values, as well as to promote these values in the daily life of the people.

2) ***Moral values***. Humans are also moral beings. The sense of moral responsibility is integral to their very nature. Spiritual and moral values are closely interrelated; they condition and enrich each other. The Bible is a living source of moral values. Love, compassion, helping the others, overcoming violence, etc. are at the heart of moral values. One can discern these values in the teachings, parables and miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must bear in mind that Christianity as a religion is not founded on a set of rules and teachings. It is a way of life guided by moral values; it is a quality of life anchored on the very life and mission of Christ.

3) ***Human values***. These pan-human values are included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which contain the dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family. They also refer to the principles of justice, freedom and peace as the foundation of human society. Values pertaining to human rights are fundamental for a dignified human life as an individual and as part of a community. Any society that is not governed by these basic human values will be dominated by oppression, alienation and conflict.

4) ***Community values***. By these values I understand those values peculiar to the Armenian Nation. These values are articulated through our faith, traditions and culture. They constitute the cornerstone of our identity. Besides our Armenian-Christian values, a true Armenian is called to embrace also all these values referred to above. To lose one of them is to lose all of them since they are intimately inter-connected.

Every human being has an ethnic, religious, social or cultural identity. The identity of a person makes him part of a community or a nation. In spite of growing globalization and disappearance of all sorts of fences and boundaries, the sense of identity will always remain strong as a refuge against the forces of globalization. One cannot deny his or her roots. In Diaspora we have become integral to ethnic, religious, cultural and social specificities of our environments. This is unavoidable and even indispensable. In the midst of diversities we must remain firmly attached to our heritage, to our own traditions, values and particularities. This is not the denial of our local identity; it is rather enriching it by our original identity and strengthening our own roots by values of our specific context.

The question is: how can we integrate in our society and yet not lose who we are? How do we keep our Armenian identity in a globalized world and, at the same time, keep pace with the process of globalization? In diaspora we have been able to live as communities and keep our history, traditions and culture alive through church, schools, clubs, community centers and community-related activities. We have inherited rich spiritual, social and moral values through our Christian faith.

At a time when people are searching for meaning in life, spiritual experience and values that will guide their lives, we must uphold and promote the basic spiritual and moral values common to all religions and cultures.

In a world dominated by value destroying forces, as Armenians we must rediscover the rich values of our Armenian Christian faith.

In environments overwhelmed by ideology of hate and violence, we must re-affirm those values which generate compassion and tolerance and respect for human life.

This is how we can build the quality of life.

Our youth are called to aim for a value-centered and value-oriented life by articulating it in all aspects of their life: in the family, in the church, in the school and in the public.

I invite our youth to reflect seriously on these issues and challenges.

Prayerfully

**ARAM I  
CATHOLICOS OF CILICIA**

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