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Armenian Apostolic Church of America
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Lent

by Rev. Dr. Gorun Shrikian

During the Lenten Season, we must pray earnestly to our heavenly Father with sincere repentance and supplication. We must forget about the afflictions of our past and "forgive those that trespass against us," beginning a new life through new spiritual efforts and understanding.

One of the most eloquent fathers of the early Christian Church, St. John Chrysostom gives us the following picture in describing our duties at the beginning of the Lenten season. He says, "As when the winter is over and the summer is appearing, the sailor draws his vessel to the deep; and the soldier burnishes his arms and makes ready his steed for the battle; and the husbandman sharpens his sickle and the traveler boldly undertakes a long journey; and the wrestler strips and bares himself for the contest. So too, when Lent makes its appearance, like a kind of spiritual summer, let us as soldiers burnish our weapons and as husbandmen let us sharpen our sickles; and as sailors let us order our thoughts against the waves of extravagant desires; and as travelers let us set out on the journey toward heaven; and as wrestlers let us strip for the contest. For the believer is at once a husbandman, and a sailor and a wrestler, and a traveler." And he adds, St. Paul said, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers. Put on, therefore, the whole armor of God."

Then the question is how can we armor our spiritual fortresses to defeat the evil nature of man always present in ourselves? How can we resist false teachings and corrupted principalities? How can we avoid the many and different kinds of temptations which we encounter during our lifetime, either during the day or during the night; when we walk, when we work, when we sleep, when we are alone or with others, and especially when we talk and make decisions hastily and irresponsibly. Then, what kind of spiritual armor must we possess to immunize us against the evil, and give us the expected victory?

When the disciples of Jesus Christ were waiting in the Upper Room of Jerusalem, as their master directed them to do, in trembling watchfulness and expectation, they received the visitation and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

What happens to the human soul when it is gifted by the Holy Spirit is suggested under the symbols of wind and fire. As we know, the coming of the Holy Spirit was like mighty wind and fire. First, let us take into consideration the symbolic characteristic of a rushing, mighty wind. A mighty wind dispels the fog, and freshens our minds to see the things in a new light. It administers a vitality and a lively desire that puts us on the paths of God-pleasing activities. Thus, it clears the human spirit from its doubt and confusion; freshens and revitalized it, and

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Pope John Paul & Catholicos Aram in Vatican



Photo by Felici

His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, was the official guest of Pope John Paul II at the Vatican, January 22 to 26. A high-ranking delegation of archbishops, state ministers, and deputies from various countries accompanied the Catholicos.

Text of the Joint Declaration of the Pope and the Catholicos is on page 2, with additional photos on page 3.

Archbishop Ashjian Honored at Feast of Light



Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian with members of the Prelacy Ladies Guild during the Feast of Light dinner-dance on February 1 in New York City's St. Regis Hotel. A special tribute honoring the Prelate on the 35th anniversary of his ordination and the 20th anniversary of his election as Prelate of the Eastern Prelacy was the major highlight of the evening. Members of the Guild include: Jeanine Adanalian, Isabella Avedissian, Anita Babikian, Linda Chirinian, Josephine Gulamerian, Ica Kouyoumdjian, Gilda Kupelian, Diana Minassian, Seta Nalbandian, Anna Piligian, Lucille Sahagian, Ovsanna Tatarian, Rita Tatevossian, Gemma Vartanian, Silva Zadourian. See page 3 and 4 for coverage and photos.

Photo by J.K. Hovhannes

From the editor...

Last month I promised to share with you from time to time some of the responses to our "Language of the Liturgy" articles which appeared in the May 1996 issue. Most were short, general statements such as "The May 96 issue of Outreach was outstanding, especially *Language of the Liturgy*"; or, "We need more thoughtful debate about issues such as you featured in the May 1996 issue." A few were longer and more personal. The following was written by a young woman in Florida.

This is in response to the recent article in Outreach titled "The Ongoing Debate About the Language of the Liturgy."

I am a 29-year-old, second generation Armenian American. Both my parents are Armenian, however, my father is a devout Armenian Catholic. I remember growing up, my brother and I went to Catholic catechism classes and Sunday School, as well as receiving First Communion. More often than not, I was confused as to which path to follow—Armenian Apostolic or Catholic? Even though they both share commonalities, one path must be chosen where one's spiritual life is concerned.

Over the past few years, I have gone through what I call an "awakening" of my Armenian spirit. What a wonderful blessing to be a product of such a proud, traditional, loving people that are the Armenians. We've gone through so much war and bloodshed that would have rendered other nationalities extinct, or be submissive to the powers that be. Our ancestors, and martyrs have given their lives for being Christian Armenians time and time again...what a travesty for our youth to throw that heritage away now!

Speaking the Armenian language is part of calling yourself Armenian. It's mainly the language, along with many other aspects of our culture, that set us apart. My parents never spoke Armenian in the house. The little Armenian I know, I learned from my grandmother. I would sit in church almost every Sunday, and be lost during the Badarak, because the service is in classical Armenian which people who spoke Armenian couldn't even understand. (I also couldn't understand the Catholic Latin mass either until I followed along in the "Missile"). Now, I attend church more than ever, because I feel fulfilled, even though I might not have understood every single word. But, the more I attend service, the more I learn.

I realize the Badarak has remained unchanged for a long time, which is a rarity in most religions. We are a people whose culture is so deeply rooted in tradition, changing something as sacred as the Badarak would be met with much discord.

Religion sometimes take a little effort. It's easy to find a religion that gets you in and out of church in 60 minutes or less and where every ancient, word and hymn has been modified for one's listening pleasure.

Being the "Year of the Youth," it is vital to instill the worth and the unique honor of being Armenian. More effort must be made to offer Armenian language classes, as well as classes to learn more about the Badarak the way it is now, before any changes take place.

It is not our parents fault or those of the church that some do not speak Armenian or understand the Badarak. It is up to the individual to possess the desire to learn more and ultimately become a better Armenian for the future.

Lisa L. Topalian
Delray Beach, Florida
June 1996

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Lent

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inflames the glowing fire of Christian love and respect in our souls. From the fire sparks the light that illuminates our mind, clears our understanding, shows our shortcomings and burns our sins and inequities, driving us toward repentance and a new life.

In the New Testament, Christ declared that we must be born again, in His dialogue with the Jewish prince, Nicodemus, if we want to enter into the kingdom of God. Thus, when a man is baptized with the Holy Spirit, his own spirit will become fervent, as it is the emergence of the mighty power of steam. Because the fire generates steam, it creates driving power and produces forceful and invincible enthusiasm. And the Apostles of Jesus Christ, baptized into this holy fire and wind, took magnificent initiative in preaching the *Word of God*.

As we know from the Acts of the Apostles, and from early church history, the first disciples of Christ encountered numerous difficulties and tremendous obstacles during the preaching of the Gospel. Indeed, they never had an open road. But everyone was full of difficulties and thick with adversities. But how then did they succeed in the work that was entrusted into their hands? How did they spread the Christian religion and faith like a quenchless flame? How did they defeat the mighty antagonism created against the new religion? How did they overcome the social hostilities of the heathen world, and the hearts of its princes, kings and emperors? They performed their miracles through another miracle, which boiled their spirits into fervency, drove them toward the ultimate victory and unto the glorious pedestals of martyrdom by accepting the gift from the Holy Spirit.

And that same holy fire of the Spirit can give us the same power today, as it did in the days of the Apostles. The Holy Spirit of God has the same driving power which can create enthusiasm, patience, humbleness, love, charity, single-mindedness, and other Christian virtues. Whatever it may be, the Holy Spirit of God is God's own presence in our souls, a presence which will always make us do the things that He wants us to do and not the thing which, by the suggestion of our human nature, we are after. If really we have a place for the Holy Spirit in our soul, if we let the mighty wind and the glowing divine fire be established in the innermost corners of our spirits, then, that fire can never be extinguished—even in the darkest and most tempestuous nights.

Then, our prayer, especially during the Lenten season, should be that the Almighty God bestow upon us the full armor of His Spirit, that we may renew our lives with Christian virtues of forgiveness and mercifulness toward our own and even toward our enemies. ❀

Correction

The December 1996 issue of Outreach included a story about the dedication of a cross which was placed above the exterior door of St. Illuminator's Cathedral in New York City. The story neglected to mention that the cross was also a gift from Mr. and Mrs. Avedis and Rosemary Alashaian in memory of the Alashaian and Merjanian families. ❀

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Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and Catholicos Aram I

As their official meeting draws to its conclusion, His Holiness Pope John Paul II and His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia, give thanks to God who has allowed them to deepen their spiritual fraternity in Jesus Christ and their pastoral and evangelical vocation in the world. The meeting has offered a privileged opportunity to pray and reflect together, and to renew their commitment and common efforts for the unity of Christians.

The meeting between the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia and the Pope of the Catholic Church marks an important milestone in their relations. This relationship, which dates to the very beginnings of Christianity in Armenia, assumed a particular importance in Cilicia from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, and has continued after the Catholicosate of Sis was exiled from its see and established in Antelias, in Lebanon, in 1930.

Pope John Paul II and Catholicos Aram I rejoice that their meeting coincides with the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, which highlights the urgency of full communion amongst Christians, so that they may fulfil their fundamental mission, which is their giving testimony to Christ, who died and was resurrected for the salvation of humanity. Throughout two millennia, the unity of faith in Jesus Christ, gift of God, has been in its essential nature maintained, despite christological and ecclesiological controversies whose origins can be traced to historic, political and socio-cultural factors. This communion of faith, which has been affirmed over the last decades at the meetings of their predecessors, was recently and solemnly reaffirmed in the meeting of His Holiness Pope John Paul II and His Holiness Catholicos Karekin I. In the same way, today the Bishop of Rome, the successor of Peter, and the Catholicos of Cilicia pray together for the deepening of the communion of faith in Jesus Christ, made possible by the blood of the martyrs and the fidelity of the Fathers to the Gospel and to the Apostolic Tradition, manifesting itself in the diversity of their respective ecclesial traditions. Such communion in faith must translate itself concretely in the life of the faithful and it must guide us towards a full communion.

The two spiritual leaders therefore highlight the vital importance of sincere dialogue undertaken in the theological and pastoral domains, as well as in other dimensions of the life and witness of the faithful. The existing relations strongly favour direct and fruitful collaboration between them. His Holiness Pope John Paul II and His Holiness Aram I are firmly convinced that, in this century in which the Christian communities have been more profoundly engaged in the ecumenical dialogue, a genuine rapprochement, sustained by reciprocal respect and understanding, constitutes the only sure and viable way leading to full communion.

The Catholic Church and the Catholicosate of Cilicia have before them a broad range of possibilities for constructive collaboration. Due to ideologies expressed in materialistic values and the disastrous effects of injustice and violence, the world today poses a profound threat to the integrity and identity of the Christian faith. More than ever before, the Church of Christ must, by its fidelity to the Gospel, give the world a message of hope and charity, and become the fervent messenger of evangelical values. Active collaboration should also be sought in the fields of the study and the teaching of theology, in religious education, in the appraisal of pastoral situations where common action is possible, and in the promotion of ethical values; similarly, it is imperative to search for ways to confront the many difficulties related to the mission and to the pastoral and spiritual engagement for the renewal of Christian life and the transformation of society. The Pope and the Catholicos urge their clergy and faithful to participate actively in these efforts which should take concrete form at all levels, and particularly at the local level where the faithful are together confronted by difficult situations. The Christian faith also urges the faithful to more effective collaboration to promote the dignity and rights of every human being, as well as the rights of all peoples to the recognition of their legitimate aspirations and cultural identities.

The Armenian Church today confronts situations and challenges which call for it to give more effective testimony in Armenia, in Nagorno-Karabagh, and in the diaspora. Dispersed throughout the world, the faithful of this Church live in contexts in which dialogue is crucial for its life and its witness.

In today's pluralist societies, characterized by exchanges, in which cultures, religions and civilizations are constantly in interrelation and interaction, the Churches have the important task of promoting dialogue. The Middle East context presents a source of mutual enrichment and common witness for Christians, who, together with their Muslim compatriots, share in large measure the same history, the same social and economic problems, and the same political destiny. Moreover, the Churches are convinced of the importance of dialogue with the Muslims, and this presents one aspect which calls for cooperation between them. Within this context, the dialogue cannot remain only intellectual and theoretical, but must also touch in a concrete way the very essentials of daily life.

The active presence and dynamic testimony of Christians assumes an important role in the Middle East, as they are committed together in the struggle for justice and peace. It is therefore imperative that in the Middle East the spiritual and social mission of the Churches is re-vitalized. The establishment of a just, comprehensive and durable peace, as well as the just and satisfactory resolution of the problem of the holy city of Jerusalem and the priorities.

Lebanon, where the Catholic Church and the Catholicosate of Cilicia have a historical and tangible presence, provides a special setting in which to exercise their mission. In their efforts for the reconciliation and reconstruction of their country, the Lebanese should not marginalise the moral and religious values which constitute the basis of identity of the larger Lebanese family. They should also work so that their country rediscovers fully its identity based on freedom and pluralism, its unity, its sovereignty and its specific vocation in the region and in the world.

At the end of the second Christian millennium and the approach of the 17th centenary of the Armenian Church, His Holiness Pope John Paul II and His Holiness Aram I thank and glorify once again the Holy Trinity who gives them the spiritual power to remain firmly attached to the imperatives of the Apostolic faith and to their pastoral mission. They exhort their clergy and their faithful to work ardently because of the love, the reconciliation, and the justice and peace that the Gospel demands while waiting for the coming of the Kingdom of God. ❀

Pope John Paul & Catholicos Aram in Vatican



Scenes from high-level meetings and social events during visit of Aram I to the Vatican.



Archbishop Ashjian with a Vatican guard in colorful red, blue, orange garb, originally designed by Michelangelo.

Vehapar with some of the individuals who accompanied him on the visit to the Vatican.

Archbishop Ashjian Honored at Feast of Light



Photo left: The lighting of the Feast of Light candles. Photo above: Judge Sarkis Teshoian, the M.C., expertly guides the program.

Photos by J.K. Hovhannes

The annual Feast of Light dinner-dance, hosted by the Ladies Guild of the Eastern Prelacy, took on an added significance this year with the commemoration of the 35th anniversary of the ordination of Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian as well as the 20th anniversary of his election as Prelate of the Eastern Prelacy.

In a moving program of testimonials, expertly guided by the Master of Ceremonies, The Honorable Judge Sarkis Teshoian, His Eminence was showered with the love and admiration of the Armenian community's leaders and people.

Congratulatory messages were received from President of the United States, the Prime Minister of Canada, the President of Armenia, the government of Karabagh, as well as a large number of individuals from around the world. Marking the dual anniversary were encyclicals issued by His Holiness Karekin I, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, and His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia.

Attending, and offering their words of congratulations were His Eminence Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America; His Eminence Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Diocese of Canada; and Very Rev. Moushegh Mardirossian, Prelate of the Western Prelacy. Attending also were Prelacy clergymen from the area including, Very Rev. Anoushavan Tanielian, Very Rev. Narek Aloustian, Archpriest Moushegh Der Kaloustian, and Archpriest Khoren Habeshian.

Archbishop Barsamian opened the program with the invocation and followed with his message, thanking the organizing committee for the invitation to share "this milestone with my Brother in Christ."

Archbishop Barsamian noted, "the past three and a half decades have led Mesrob Srpazan on a journey of both spiritual and geographic dimen-

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On hand to congratulate Archbishop Ashjian, (left to right), Very Rev. Moushegh Mardirossian, Prelate of the Western Prelacy; Mrs. Shaké Mekhjian; Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of Canada; Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate of the Armenian Church of America; Archbishop Ashjian; Mr. Hirair Hovnanian, chairman of Armenian Assembly; Mrs. Anna Hovnanian; and Dr. Haroutune Mekhjian.



Feast of Light

(Continued from page 3)

sions...that journey has been characterized and enriched by Mesrob Srpazan's many virtues. His decency, his sense of humor, his dedication, these are some of the fine human qualities which have made him beloved among the people, and which have inspired loyalty in so many hearts."

The Primate also noted that "Over the past several years, it has been a privilege for me to serve on a number of committees and organizations alongside Mesrob Srpazan, and to strengthen the personal bond between us. He is a man who recognizes the beauty and importance of the Armenian church, and he wants the best for this grand institution, which has nurtured our history and shaped our national destiny. Most of all, he is a man who is able to focus his vision on the future: on its potential obstacles, as well as the shining possibilities which lie beyond them."

Concluding with words of best wishes for many more years of service, Archbishop Barsamian presented Mesrob Srpazan with a beautiful gold cross from Etchmiadzin.

Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Diocese of Canada, offered poignant words of his own encounter with Mesrob Srpazan. He quoted from a letter written by Archbishop Mesrob many years ago when Archbishop Hovnan was a young student, encouraging him in his studies and offering words of guidance.

"Who does not know Archbishop Mesrob?" Hovnan Srpazan asked. "He is a man of the people," he said, "who knows how to best serve his beloved people, church and nation." Hovnan Srpazan spoke of the influence Mesrob Srpazan has had on his own life of service since 1970. He presented Archbishop Ashjian with a "modern manuscript" as a remembrance of this important event.

Very Rev. Moushegh Mardirossian, Prelate of the Western Diocese, extended his congratulations and the best wishes of the Western Prelacy's religious and executive councils.

"I join you in paying homage to our beloved Brother-in-Christ, my favorite teacher and dean of the Seminary in Antelias. All through the years he enhanced, enriched and fortified his distinguished career as an energetic, devoted, and dedicated teacher and preacher, a firm believer in the mission of the Armenian Church and advocate of the world-wide ecumenical movement. For the past two decades he became a highly admired and popular Prelate in the U.S."

Very Rev. Mardirossian continued, "Under the wise leadership and patronage of our two Pontiffs, His Holiness Karekin I and His Holiness Aram I, Archbishop Ashjian will surely and confidently lead our church and the faithful to a new millennium, ushering in a new dawn, a new era of spiritual revival, glory, splendor, and prosperity for our ancient church, the bastion of our Christian faith and homeland."

Dr. Raffy Hovanessian, a long-time friend, delivered the keynote address. Dr. Hovanessian first spoke in Armenian telling the guests, "I would like to speak first in Armenian because words coming from the heart must be in your native tongue."

Dr. Hovanessian went on to say that "no matter how much time and energy is devoted, justice cannot be done to the honoree. I have to go back to 1965 for our first encounter. His Eminence came to Beirut to be the advisor of the Armenian Christian University organization of which I was the president. He was young, energetic and newly graduated from his studies in Switzerland and the United States. Our next meeting was in 1977 when he assumed his present position as Prelate of the Eastern United States and Canada. He came with the

Photos by J.K. Hovhannes



Dr. Raffy Hovanessian delivers the keynote address.

best of recommendations from his mentor, His Holiness Karekin II of the Cilician See, who told me, 'Take care of him as you would do for me. He is a worthy servant of the church.'

Dr. Hovanessian went on to describe seven characterizations of His Eminence: A Man of the Cloth; Teacher and Principal; Writer and Publisher; Builder of Churches; Supporter of Culture; Advocate of Human Rights; and Benevolence.

"There are persons whose characters shine because of the position they hold. Mesrob Srpazan's character makes his position shine. It is no wonder that sometimes I think, Can such a man exist?... and How can he find time for all he does? He exists because he does everything with full devotion and dedication fulfilling that oath which he took on the altar in Antelias in 1961."

Dr. Hovanessian concluded by saying, "Srpazan's life of service has illuminated the entire Armenian church and nation. And I am proud to call him a brother."



Mark Markarian, Jr., who read the congratulatory message from President Clinton, presents a set of inaugural medallions to Srpazan—a gift from the President.



Srpazan is flanked by Mr. and Mrs. John Bedrosian from Los Angeles. Very Rev. Moushegh Mardirossian, left, Prelate of the Western Prelacy, announced an additional donation made by the Bedrosians. At right is Very Rev. Khajag Hagopian, Vicar-General of Canada.

The family of the late Puzant Yeghiayan used this occasion to make a presentation to Archbishop Ashjian as stipulated in Mr. Yerghiayan's last will and testament.

Speaking on behalf of the family his daughter, Mrs. Arpi Simonian, quoted from her father's will: "Among my books there is a precious Bible in classical Armenian, printed in 1860 in Venice. It belonged to the highly revered Maghakia Patriarch Ormanian. His handwritten inscription on the first page indicates that he gave it to Rev. Zaven Der Yeghiayan on the occasion of the latter's graduation from the seminary in Armash. Years later Archbishop Der Yeghiayan was ordained as Patriarch of Constantinople. And when in 1963 Zaven Patriarch donated his entire personal collection of books to the Armenian Seminary in Antelias the Bible was given to me. I used it for many years as the reference for my lectures on 'Critical Analysis of Biblical

Times' course and used it as the original source for my five-volume texts for the course. Now it is my wish to pass on this treasured historic Bible to His Eminence Archbishop Mesrob Ashjian for his personal library."

Mrs. Simonian presented the historic Bible to Mesrob Srpazan saying, "It gives me great pleasure to fulfill my late father's wishes. I feel honored and privileged to be presenting this to you on his behalf with gratitude and appreciation."

Prior to Archbishop Ashjian's response to the glowing testimonials, Mrs. Gemma Vartanian, presented him with a diamond studded cross for his lapel, on behalf of the members of the Prelacy Ladies Guild, as a "constant reminder of our love and appreciation." Mrs. Vartanian noted that the beautiful cross was designed and made by Mr. Nazaret Nazarian who was in the audience.

Archbishop Ashjian came to the podium as the audience gave him a standing ovation. "This is a difficult task



Well-known community leader, Mr. Suren Fesjian, congratulates Archbishop Ashjian.

for me," he said, "to adequately express what I feel. Let me express very simply my heartfelt thanks. I confess I am humbled and embarrassed, because as a churchman I did my duty. I am dedicated to serve."

He continued, "Let me just say thank you also for taking this annual Feast of Light dinner-dance and 'spoiling' it this way for me. It is an evening for festivities, not testimonials. I want to thank the Prelacy Ladies Guild, who in spite of my reservations, insisted on this special tribute and they brought it to a glorious fruition."

His Eminence expressed his heartfelt thanks to his Brothers-in-Christ whose beautiful words "strengthened me and filled me with grace and greater resolve to serve with even more fervor."

In a particularly poignant moment, Srpazan said, "Today is February 1st. This is a date I will never forget. Two years ago I was in Paris and February 1st and 2nd did not exist for me, because I was in a kind of a coma. I was taken to the hospital on January 31 and woke up three days later without any memory of those days. You can imagine how grateful I am to the Lord that He gave me life. He gave me the people, the doctors, some of whom are here tonight, who helped me survive."

He thanked all of the people who through their prayers helped him through those difficult days and months. "Now I am living to serve Him and His church—the Armenian Church which I consider the greatest gift of God to the Armenian people, the church to which I owe everything that I am, that I exist for, I strive for."

Before concluding his brief remarks, Archbishop Ashjian addressed words for "some who are not here tonight. Those who in a sense have been critical saying, 'Srpazan, we elected you Prelate of the Eastern United States and Canada; we did not elect you Prelate of Armenia.' As an Armenian and a churchman I cannot separate myself from the Armenian church in the States and in Armenia. I serve the Armenian church. Period!...There will come a day when Armenia will not need us, but these days we must share."

His concluding words were words of deep thanks to all in attendance and all who contributed toward the rebuilding of the Sourp Kevork Monastery in Armenia in his honor. "Anytime between now and then when you go to Armenia and visit the monasteries and especially Sourp Kevork you will know you had a share in the rebuilding of that church, you had a share in the rebuilding of the Armenian nation and church...Thank you. God bless you all."

Everyone in attendance agreed that the elegant evening was a very fitting tribute to a dedicated churchman and a wonderful human being. Archbishop Ashjian received the warmth and loving acknowledgement that he richly deserves and as the M.C., Judge Teshoian, summarized, "Whatever has been said this evening is limited in terms of human limitation and that which is in our hearts is inadequate in terms of the expressions we make." ❀