

Fourth Sunday of the Holy Cross – Community, Communication, and Communion

*Delivered by Rev. Fr. Ghevond Ajamian
St. Sarkis Armenian Church. Carrollton, TX
October 8, 2017
Gospel Reading: Mark*

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Next week our community will have the 22nd ArmeniaFest. ArmeniaFest is a time when our community comes together and unites for three days for the success of our church, our people and our nation. It is a time when we show off what we have had, what we have and what we will have. One of those things that we love to show off is our food. It is not news to anyone that Armenians love food. We love eating and we love feeding people. And perhaps that is why three very important things take place around the table: community, communication and communion. We see that these three words all have the same root, which is *common*. *Common* means, something that is shared by all and around a table, we all share, or partake in, community, communication and communion.

Food and meals are things that all humans can relate to because we all hunger. Everyone from the smallest baby to the oldest person feel hunger. Even the Lord knew what hunger is and we see this in the first request of the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread". Yet Food does something else. It unites people and opens the lines of communication. Food is involved when new neighbors move in and when two people go out on a date and even when children want to make friends. Why? Because, with food, people are able to put their differences aside and even reconcile when wrongs have been done.

This is especially true with Holy Communion, which unites us into one body in Jesus Christ, which is the Church. This is why if someone is holding a grudge against another or has not forgiven them for something, that person should not approach and should not partake in Holy Communion, because they cannot share in the same meal (i.e. sit at the same table) with the other person.

We see this during the Kiss of Peace (page 27 in the Divine Liturgy books), where the hymn reads, "This Church has now become one soul, the kiss is given for a full bond, the enmity has been removed and love is spread over us all." These words remind us that only love must exist as we join together around the Holy Altar, in the presence of Christ whose is enthroned upon the altar in the chalice. If we notice carefully, the priest slightly opens the veil which is

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covering the chalice and reveals the bread (the Body of Christ) for the first time during the Divine Liturgy. This is why we greet one another with the salutation, “Christ is revealed amongst us”, for He truly is.

Through Holy Communion, not only do we commune (unite) with one another and establish love amongst us, but we also commune with the saints and our loved ones who have fallen asleep in Christ and also with God Himself. Christ says, “Whoever eats of my body and drinks of my blood resides in me and I in him” (John 6:56). Last week we spoke about how God is in all of us because we are all created in His image and likeness, but through Holy Communion, Jesus Christ physically resides in us.

Sometimes we forget the power of Holy Communion and this could be because we never learned about it or the priest never preaches about it or other preachers and churches teach that Holy Communion is only bread and wine and nothing else, but Holy Communion is the greatest weapon we have against Satan because Holy Communion is Jesus Christ’s Body and Blood. St. John Chrysostom, the patriarch of Constantinople in the 4th century says, “Holy Communion is a fire that inflames us, that like lions breathing fire, we may retire from the altar being made terrible to the devil”.

As such, Satan will stop at nothing to prevent us from going to church and partaking in the Body and Blood of Christ. He will feed us lies and make us believe that there are more important things than being part of a community which communicates and communes with our Creator. He will trick us and we will fall into the trap of belittling Holy Communion and the Church. He will do everything to keep us out of this sanctuary and away from the life-giving Body and Blood of our Lord and Savior.

Unfortunately, Satan has been very successful in our parish and he has kept many away. We know this only by seeing how many people come to church on a regular Sunday and compare that number with how many will be here next week at ArmeniaFest. It is our job and responsibility to fight him by inviting our community to commune with Christ and with each other.

So next week, when we have our ArmeniaFest and we see many people from our community who for one reason or another do not frequent our church and do not partake in Holy Communion, let us invite them, lovingly, compassionately and with a smile so that when they do return, we may all truly experience a community, communication and Holy Communion. Amen.