

Red Sunday – Chalice and Kshots

*Delivered by Rev. Fr. Ghevond Ajamian
St. Sarkis Armenian Church. Carrollton, TX
April 22, 2018
Gospel Reading: John 5:19-30*

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

Last week was Green Sunday and we learned that the church is a living, breathing organism which grows and changes – something that must be taken out of the four walls of the church building and brought to the people of the world. Today, in the Armenian Church calendar, is known as Red Sunday. Today we come to the reality that if the Church is a living, growing organism, then it also bleeds, and the blood it bleeds is the blood of the Holy Martyrs.

Tertullian, a great Church Father of the 3rd century, says, “The seed of the Church is the blood of the martyrs”. The more faithful who die for their faith and for Christ, the stronger, greater and larger the Church becomes. We see this fact in history. Every time a government or nation persecuted Christians in hope that Christianity would be wiped out, the opposite happened.

The greatest example of this is Jesus Christ. He laid down His life for the Church, so it might live. He laid down His life for us, so we might live. Every Sunday we remember that sacrificial act and that is why our Divine Liturgy, which we celebrate every Sunday, is called the Badarak in Armenian. Badarak means sacrifice. We remember that sacrifice every Sunday, but let us not think Christ is sacrificed again and again. He was sacrificed once and for all, but that which we do every Sunday is referred to as a “bloodless sacrifice” in our prayers and Liturgy.

We believe that every Sunday, through our prayers, the Holy Spirit descends from heaven and dwells in the bread and wine, making it the Body and Blood of Christ in the chalice. How this happens, we do not know, but we believe it happens as Christ said. Yet the chalice is an essential part of the Divine Liturgy, the Church and every Christian community, especially the Armenian Church.

This Thursday will be the 25th anniversary of our chalice in this community. On the bottom of the chalice is engraved “*Donated by the Kurkjian Family April 26, 1993*”, thus making this Thursday 25 years of service. Naturally, because of my position in the church, I see the chalice in more detail than others and there are four symbols I want to draw everyone’s attention to.

The first is the Armenian letter “Eh”, the seventh letter of the Armenian alphabet, which represents and symbolizes God’s eternity. The second symbol is a lamb, which represents the Son, Jesus Christ, who was sacrificed for us. The third is the dove, which shows the Holy Spirit who descends from heaven. And the final symbol is a picture of Holy Etchmiadzin, which reminds us that we as a church and community, belong to something greater and larger than just St. Sarkis Church, but to Universal Church and we are united to each other every Sunday through Holy Communion.

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Naturally, when we see the chalice, we think of Jesus Christ, Holy Communion, salvation, the Last Supper, and these are all correct, but we should think of something else: the kshots (fan). Unbeknownst to many, the kshots (the large, circular fan which has bells and is attached to a long pole) and the chalice go hand in hand. The true purpose of the kshots, in the early church, was to drive flies away. Even to this day, in the villages of Armenia, churches do not have windows and fly traps, so during the Liturgy, there are flies all around and the kshots is used to keep them away.

When a fly sees pure, sweet wine, it wants to go to it and defile it, but the kshots prevents it from doing so. The same is true in our lives. When we receive Holy Communion, we are made clean and pure, temples of the Holy Spirit. Once Satan sees this, he sends his demons, vices and sins to corrupt and defile us.

How many times in life have we been great, close to God and then problems arise?

How many times have we been at peace and then a storm arises?

How many times have we been concentrated on something and a fly comes and bothers us?

The question then is: what is your kshots? What keeps evil away from you? It may be prayer, fasting, charity, the Church, our community, the Bible, silence and meditation, family and friends, but the greatest kshots in our life is the Holy Spirit. When evil and misfortune approach us, when temptation approaches, do we use our kshots, or do we allow the flies to dirty us? Do we call of the Holy Spirit to protect us or do we think we can handle the situation?

Today, Red Sunday, we remember the countless martyrs of the Church, and on Tuesday we will remember the martyrs and saints of the Genocide. Let us also remember the lives that they lived and the kshots they used to keep evil away, and live lives dedicated to Christ. May we be able to apply those same principles and faith in our dealings so that we too may be counted among them at the final day of judgement.

Amen.