

In the month of September, we celebrated our sign of faith, the Holy Cross, and how throughout the centuries it has guided all Christians as a beacon of light and giving to all who follow and honor it the security, comfort, identity and peace we seek from Christ. No other faith visibly provides blessings the way our Cross does. As an icon of our Christian faith, it is Jesus' constant light from God telling us that He is never far from us. All we need do is turn to the Light that shines forth from this Holy image.

The Feast of the Holy Cross of Varak, commemorated uniquely in the Armenian Church, is a special day once again, remembering the Holy Cross and how like Bethlehem's star which the Three Kings saw in the sky and led them to find Christ, a vision of two Armenian monks. A cross-shaped light helped them discover a holy relic of the true Cross in the monastery of Varak in the seventh century and that Jesus the Savior lived among the Armenian faithful despite the travails, challenges and difficulties they experienced from persecuting powers and peoples.

This miraculous revelation to these monks fortified them, grounded them in their faith more fervently in spite adversities and helped them never to forget that God is not far when the Cross is near. Throughout the history of our Armenian Christianity, our faith has been tested. Many wondered if we as a church and nation could survive the calamities set upon us. The challenges of past centuries that gave endurance and the will to live have not ended. Daily, in these times, we encounter difficulties and hardships wondering perhaps how our Lord's Cross can rescue us from our perils. Will it be our guiding light?

As the Cross gave strength during the horror filled days of our Genocide, during the times of warfare, and more recently the calamity of 9/11, we should never forget the Cross has been and still is our strength and our survival no matter what. This image is like the voice of Jesus saying still, *I am with you even to the end*. Our challenge is to remain faithful, to honor the Cross, follow its light and discover the saving grace God offers to us.

Our challenges may not be as great as those our grandparents experienced and the oppression they endured, nonetheless there are situations in life that still test our faith. There are people who still defy the power of the Cross... governments and peoples who trampled the Cross underfoot, or try to tear it from our hearts, minds and bodies. Persecutions are still very much with us today in forms other than death and devastation. There are people demolishing our churches, placing restrictions on Armenian Christian life, our language, and our culture. Holding firm to what the Cross represents, "victory", we can survive, endure, and rise above adversity because Christ Jesus our God, we believe, is with us; like the words from that well known hymn ... *we shall overcome*.

The Cross is the very clothing of our bodies that dresses us with physical and spiritual strength and as it has spared us in the past, protected us, and guided us with strength, wisdom and hope of victory to overcome—it continues to do so because it is the light of Christ that shows us the way to God.

Like that star that guided the Three Kings to find Christ, and like the vision of Light that guided the two monks at Varak and provided spiritual solace and strength of faith to the Armenian people who lived there in ancient times, the Light of the Cross still guides us today.

Jesus says, *I am the Light of the world. He who comes to me will have everlasting light*. We willingly then go to the Cross, not just to suffer but also to survive. We hold firm our faith.

We endure every persecution because we believe that to bear our crosses, to wear our crosses, to share our crosses with each other, Our Lord's promise will bring us to the mountain of salvation and *we shall overcome*.

It took one man named Y'eshua, in whom God became life and breath; the Light of the world that through the Cross still shines. As it came to Varak and helped the monks discover our God who is always with them, and, as the same light guided the wise men to discover Christ God, born among men, so too, today the Cross still shines.

*O Lord – from Your Cross You promised to come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.*

*Help us to live in faith as we await You.*

*Keep us from doubt and unbelief, so that by the power of Your Cross, we might be free from fear.*

*Give hope to those who still deny You as the blessed medicine of immortality that flows from Your Cross.*

*Amen.*

*"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God"(1 Cor. 18).*