

Dear Friends,

The Armenian Church celebrates one of the most preeminent Fathers of the Eastern Church, Saint John the Golden-Mouthed (A.D. 344-407). As his surname implies, he is renowned as one of the greatest preachers the Church has ever known. It is said that pick-pocketers would come to where St. John was preaching, not to hear the message, but because they knew that the faithful were so in awe at his preaching that they were easy prey.

Armenia, which in his day lay outside the Roman Empire, was graced with the presence of St. John who spent his last years on earth there in exile. He was exiled there from the Imperial City of Constantinople (of which he was Archbishop) through the influence of the Empress Eudoxia due to his strong preaching against the immorality of his times. It was fitting for this saint who so willingly took up his cross and followed our Lord that he should fall asleep in the Lord on the feast of the Holy Cross, September 14th. I named my first-born son, "John," partly in his honor due to my great respect for his holiness and wisdom. Here's an excellent example of the profundity of St. John the Golden-Mouthed taken from a sermon he preached on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthian Church.

In Christ's Light,
Wm. Der-Ghazarian

THE WEAKNESS OF GOD IS STRONGER THAN MEN

It was clear through unlearned men that the cross was persuasive, in fact, it persuaded the whole world. Their discourse was not of unimportant matters but of God and true religion, of the Gospel way of life and future judgment, yet it turned plain, uneducated men into philosophers. How the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and his weakness stronger than men!

In what way is it stronger? It made its way throughout the world and overcame all men; countless men sought to eradicate the very name of the Crucified, but that name flourished and grew ever mightier. Its enemies lost out and perished; the living who waged war on a dead man proved helpless. Therefore, when a Greek tells me I am dead, he shows only that he is foolish indeed, for I, whom he thinks a fool, turn out to be wiser than those reputed wise. So too, in calling me weak, he but shows that he is weaker still. For the good deeds which tax-collectors and fishermen were able to accomplish by God's grace, the philosophers, the rulers, the countless multitudes cannot even imagine.

Paul had this in mind when he said: "The weakness of God is stronger than men." That the preaching of these men was indeed divine is brought home to us in the same way. For how otherwise could twelve uneducated men, who lived on lakes and rivers and wastelands, get the idea for such an immense enterprise? How could men who perhaps had never been in a city or a public square think of setting out to do battle with the whole world? That they were fearful, timid men, the evangelist makes clear; he did not reject the fact or try to hide their weaknesses. Indeed he turned these into a proof of the truth. What did he say of them? That when Christ was arrested, the others fled, despite all the miracles they had seen, while he who was leader of the others denied him!

How then account for the fact that these men, who in Christ's lifetime did not stand up to the attacks by the Jews, set forth to do battle with the whole world once Christ was dead - if, as you claim, Christ did not rise and speak to them and rouse their courage? Did they perhaps say to themselves: 'What is this? He could not save himself but he will protect us? He did not help himself when he was alive, but now that he is dead he will extend a helping hand to us? In his lifetime he brought no nation under his banner, but by uttering his name we will win over the whole world?' Would it not be wholly irrational even to think such thoughts, much less to act upon them?

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It is evident, then, that if they had not seen him risen and had proof of his power, they would not have risked so much.

(if this has left you desiring more, here is St. John's Paschal Homily which in many Eastern Churches is read every year on the glorious feast of the Resurrection)

The Paschal Homily of St. John Chrysostom
Read Each Year at the Paschal Vigil (Eastern Roman Churches)

Is there anyone who is a devout lover of God? Let them enjoy this beautiful bright festival! Is there anyone who is a grateful servant? Let them rejoice and enter into the joy of their Lord!

Are there any weary with fasting? Let them now receive their wages! If any have toiled from the first hour, let them receive their due reward; If any have come after the third hour, let him with gratitude join in the Feast! And he that arrived after the sixth hour, let him not doubt; for he too shall sustain no loss. And if any delayed until the ninth hour, let him not hesitate; but let him come too. And he who arrived only at the eleventh hour, let him not be afraid by reason of his delay.

For the Lord is gracious and receives the last even as the first. He gives rest to him that comes at the eleventh hour, as well as to him that toiled from the first. To this one He gives, and upon another He bestows. He accepts the works as He greets the endeavor. The deed He honors and the intention He commends.

Let us all enter into the joy of the Lord! First and last alike receive your reward; rich and poor, rejoice together! Sober and slothful, celebrate the day! You that have kept the fast, and you that have not, rejoice today for the Table is richly laden! Feast royally on it, the calf is a fatted one. Let no one go away hungry. Partake, all, of the cup of faith. Enjoy all the riches of His goodness!

Let no one grieve at his poverty, for the universal kingdom has been revealed. Let no one mourn that he has fallen again and again; for forgiveness has risen from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the Death of our Savior has set us free. He has destroyed it by enduring it.

He destroyed Hades when He descended into it. He put it into an uproar even as it tasted of His flesh. Isaiah foretold this when he said, "You, O Hell, have been troubled by encountering Him below."

Hell was in an uproar because it was done away with. It was in an uproar because it is mocked. It was in an uproar, for it is destroyed. It is in an uproar, for it is annihilated. It is in an uproar, for it is now made captive. Hell took a body, and discovered God. It took earth, and encountered Heaven. It took what it saw, and was overcome by what it did not see. O death, where is thy sting? O Hades, where is thy victory?

Christ is Risen, and you, O death, are annihilated! Christ is Risen, and the evil ones are cast down! Christ is Risen, and the angels rejoice! Christ is Risen, and life is liberated! Christ is Risen, and the tomb is emptied of its dead; for Christ having risen from the dead, is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

---To Him be Glory and Power forever and ever. Amen!

