

Lift The Curtain, Pull Off The Mask

*Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.
The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. --James 5:16*

As we often talk about, there are just two relationships to work on as a Christian, very simple and straightforward; 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind' and 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Simple, yes, but not easy at all. Not easy, because as our church strikingly symbolizes, there is a curtain of separation (sin) between us and God. It is a lifetime work, and a very rewarding one, to work with God to begin to see through this curtain, for us to know Him more clearly, and to be known. That's the entire point of church. It's not easy though; if it were there might be a lot more people here!

But for those of us making the effort, coming to church is first and foremost where we attempt to offer God something. Yes taking time out of our busy week to be here, yes the money we put in the plate which is all of our joyful duty. But, of course our Lord said we are to love God with all our heart, soul and mind. Beyond time and money, God wants you, your heart, yourself. As the psalmist says, "the offering pleasing to God is a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart."—Ps. 51. We are to put our whole hearts into the worship of God during Badarak, and it is each of your main duties in coming to church to participate by worshipping God. It can be in English, in Armenian, in French or Russian...in fully formed thoughts, run on sentences, goo-goo gaa-gaa, or no words at all—but it must be giving yourself fully to God when you are in church. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why liturgy is long. Very few can focus on praying, worshipping God for 2 hours...but if we come to focus on God first for 20 minutes, then 40, then an hour, this is very pleasing to God.

So the first reason we are in church is to come to know, love and be known by God, by his grace to start to lift the curtain that separates us. But the second reason we are here is so that we might learn to love our neighbor as ourselves. What does this look like, practically in a church setting? James tells us today in his letter to his church... "Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed."

Not only are we separated from God with a curtain of separation, we are separated from our neighbors and ourselves. We open the curtain right before confession and communion, to symbolize that through real confession, we are pulling off a mask that we wear in our everyday lives. We wear a mask that we are strong, that we are righteous, that we and our families are perfect and that we and are work are to be admired and put on a pedestal.

But this is not real. We have to pull off the mask if we want to be free. We have to be real, become real before God and others, if we want real forgiveness, real cleansing, and real life. We have to use that most important time in church, our general confession, to not just confess to God, but to remember our sins to others and commit to telling them. Use it to confess our faults to our parents, to our children, our brothers and sisters, our fellow parishioner. Now, obviously we can't be doing this out loud in church...if you think Badarak is long now, just think what would happen if some of us started confessing our sins to each other!

Church rather is the powerful seed that is planted in us every Sunday and is to blossom throughout the rest of the week. A true Christian life isn't finished in Sunday worship, it is just begun; we need the rest of the week to put it into practice. And to do that, we need to be honest with each other and before God. We must offer ourselves as we really are, not as pretenders and hypocrites. For as long as we wear a mask, we are just clowning around with our Christianity. But, if we confess our faults, our offenses, our slips, and our sins to God and one another, and pray about them, we shall experience healing. We will see that the wall separating us from what we are to be in God and for each other, becomes a curtain, and the curtain, becomes a veil, and, for the one who turns to the Lord, says Paul, the veil will be removed, and we will know and praise the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and always...