

Bacon & Egg Breakfast

On occasion in my sermons, I have alluded to medieval Armenian Churchman Mkhitar Gosh's Fables, his collection of morality tales using animals and plants as his characters. In the manner of Gosh, I have a humorous fable for you today to lead us into the spirit of stewardship Sunday: A pig and a chicken were walking through the barnyard one day, whispering about a birthday plan for their master Farmer Bedros. 'What do you think we should get Farmer Bedros for his birthday?' the pig asked the chicken. 'Well maybe we could go in on something together,' replied the chicken. 'We could make him a bacon and egg breakfast.' Astonished, the pig turns to the chicken, 'For you this is a contribution, but for me this is a total commitment!' Gosh's fables always have a lesson for believers; so too does this tale. You could say that on Sundays and in the course of our lives, we offer up our own bacon and egg breakfasts to celebrate the great love and care of our Lord. Like the chicken, we offer contributions of what we have to sustain God's church and each other. And like the pig, we are even called to offer our very lives to God, trusting ever deeper in God's eternal promise of redemption and renewal.

So let's start with the chicken and her contribution. Like a chicken works hard for its eggs, we work hard for our money. It takes spiritual discipline over a lifetime to become generous with all we have. Our stewardship program trains each of us in becoming better givers, and by our contributions we sustain the mission and operations of this church community. You can't have a bacon and egg breakfast without eggs, and you can't have a church without lights, insurance, air conditioning, etc. You also can't have a church without a mission to those in need, which is why our contributions also go to serve our brothers and sisters in Armenia. Now our monetary pledges are essential for church life, but they alone are not enough; no more than raw eggs alone are enough for a birthday breakfast. You need people to prepare, serve and clean up the meal, like our women's guild does. You need people to organize our celebrations like the parish council and events committee do. You need people to beautify our celebrations with music, flowers and incense, like our altar servers and choir do. That's why stewardship is equally about our contributions of finances and of our time to serve those resources to each other. You can't have one without the other, and to the extent that we have both, St. Hagop will continue to grow in communion with God and each other. And let's remember that with stewardship we benefit from our own contributions, like the chicken in our fable. Just like the chicken gets to enjoy the party and the eggs she has brought; so too do we enjoy the great meals, worship, care and fellowship which is the result of everyone's contribution!

The pig is in a tougher spot however. It seems that the pig will not enjoy his offering to the master's party, because it requires his very life. Though we tend not to think of it in this way, throughout our gospels Our Lord seems to put us in a similar spot. Jesus doesn't just ask that we give our resources to His church, but that we give our very selves, our very lives for Him. 'For those who want to save their life will lose it,' says Jesus 'and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.' (Mt 16:25) But here now is where we differ from the animals, and where our faith becomes central. Somehow, when we follow Jesus with total commitment, offering our lives back to the giver of life, we do not cease to be. Instead, our lives are redeemed and renewed in this life unto the next. Our sacrifice becomes a sacrifice pleasing to God. This mystery animates our entire Scriptures, our sacraments and our very lives. In baptism we must die and be born again unto new life. In communion, we must renounce our sinful selves and turn back toward God. In old age, we must let go of our earthly lives so that we might enter our heavenly one. The sacrifice required of a Christian is total, but the life we give pales in comparison to the life we gain.

So here now you see the wisdom contained in our fable of the chicken and the pig, of which I hope Mkhitar Gosh would approve. And here you see why this church asks each of us for a bacon and egg breakfast! Our church is sustained by our stewardship contributions, and all of us benefit from the gifts we bring to God's table. As stewardship Sunday approaches, may we at St. Hagop always give generously of our time and treasure to this church which blesses us, our children and our mission in Armenian homelands. But let's also remember that our giving does not stop there. May we always keep before us the central imperative of our faith, to offer our very lives back to the Giver of life, who mysteriously reworks and redeems his creation in ways we can hardly imagine or understand; now and always and unto the ages of ages, amen.