

GREETINGS FROM METROPOLITAN TIKHON
GLOBAL FORUM ON ARMENIAN GENOCIDE
April 22, 2015

Your Holinesses, Your Eminences, Your Graces, Reverend Fathers and Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,



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On behalf of the Holy Synod of Bishops, the clergy and the faithful of the Orthodox Church in America, I wish to thank His Holiness, Patriarch Karekin II, for his kind invitation to participate in today's Global Forum and tomorrow's Canonization of the Victims of the Armenian Genocide. It is a blessing to be with so many brothers and sisters from diverse Churches and organizations for this important commemoration, which touches the hearts of all who would consider themselves human beings.

I would like to preface my brief words in order to mention that I represent a Church whose geographical territory includes the United States and Canada, one of whose governments has formally acknowledged the Armenian Genocide and the other who has not, to date, done so. This is a further illustration of the geopolitical tensions surrounding this issue that were spoken of in this morning's Global Forum session. Nevertheless, I bring to you the support and prayers of the many North American faithful who have roots in Armenia and all other regions of the world where persecution and other acts of violence against humanity have been, and continue to be perpetrated.

The Holy Apostle Paul reminds us of one of the foundations of the Christian life when he writes to Timothy: *Everyone who desires to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted* (II Timothy 3:12). Our Lord offered the only response a Christian can make in the face of persecution: *You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you* (Matthew 5:43-44).

We are not here today to lament the suffering and pain inflicted by others. Instead, we proclaim the power of a godly life in Christ that enables us to endure great tribulation for His sake. Hence, today we honor the lives of those Armenians martyrs who so glorified God through their sufferings.

And we are not here today merely to speak about justice but to bear witness to the truth that there can be no peace without justice. We are adamant that the suffering of the victims and descendants of the Armenian Genocide should be recognized. At the same time, we share the profound conviction that the Kingdom of heaven is not attained through war, mass murder, genocide or holocaust, but by living the difficult and sacrificial way of the Cross -- by delighting in the resurrection and the love that renders all adversaries powerless.

How can we contribute to this?

Some inspiration might be drawn from Saint Gregor Narekatsi, the tenth century Armenian saint who lived at the Monastery on Lake Van in what is today Southeastern Turkey -- where 100 years ago 55,000 Armenians were massacred. In an article written in 1916 by a member of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, we read how fish drawn from that lake could not be eaten because of the multitude of floating corpses. This, certainly, is inhuman. But Saint Gregory reminds us that we are *all* inhuman. He writes:

*We are all inhuman.
How can I call myself human,
When I have earned a place among the inhuman?
How can I be named a thinking being,
When I indulge in brutish ways?
How can I be called a seeing being,
When I have snuffed out my inner light?
How can I be known as cognizant
When I have slammed the door on wisdom?
How can I aspire to incorruptible grace,
When with my own hand I have slain my soul?*

As Christians, we can begin reconciliation by recognizing -- even in our enemies -- our common humanity and inhumanity. By recognizing our own inhumanity, as Saint Gregory does, we may provoke the humanity of our enemies by the grace of God. Truly, this is a hard saying and a heavy cross. No one can pick up someone else's cross. Yet, 100 years after the genocide, it is this cross of reconciliation that the descendants of the new martyrs can indeed pick up and carry, as yet another sign of resurrection and, ultimately, divine love.

Your Holiness, may the risen Saviour give you and us the courage to accomplish this.