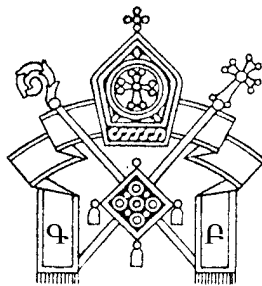


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SUPREME PATRIARCH
CATHOLICOS
OF ALL ARMENIANS
MOTHER SEE OF HOLY ETCHMIADZIN

KAREKIN II, SERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST

BY THE MERCY OF GOD AND WILL OF THE NATION
CHIEF BISHOP AND CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS
SUPREME PATRIARCH OF THE NATIONAL PRE-EMINENT ARARATIAN SEE
OF THE APOSTOLIC UNIVERSAL MOTHER CHURCH OF HOLY ETCHMIADZIN

GREETINGS OF LOVE IN CHRIST, AND PATRIARCHAL BLESSINGS

TO THE CATHOLICATE OF THE GREAT HOUSE OF CILICIA,
THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATES OF HOLY JERUSALEM AND CONSTANTINOPLE,
THE ARCHBISHOPS, BISHOPS, ARCHIMANDRITES, PRIESTS, AND DEACONS,
THE DIOCESAN ASSEMBLIES, DIOCESAN AND PARISH COUNCILS AND OFFICERS,
AND TO ALL OUR BELOVED ARMENIAN FAITHFUL

“Arise, sons of light, to bless the Father of Light.” (BOOK OF HOURS)

*“We cry out the commandments of God as a watchman
from a lofty watchtower in your hearing.”* (GENERAL EPISTLE)

THIS YEAR, WITH A SACRED FEELING OF GRATITUDE, we are marking the 850th anniversary of the death of the great Armenian Catholicos, Saint Nersess *Shnorhali* (“the Graceful”).

Catholicos Saint Nersess *Shnorhali* is among the most renowned and accomplished of all Armenian catholicos: an illustrious theologian and homilist; a gifted poet, musician, historian, and teacher. As a good shepherd who *“laid down his life for his sheep”* (John 10:11), Catholicos Nersess IV was a virtuous leader, a brightly-lit beacon for our people, and a tireless cultivator in the vineyard of the Lord. His extremely fruitful ministry radiated outward from the Patriarchal See established in Hromkla; and even under conditions of personal exile, this blessed chief shepherd strove to ensure that the spiritual and national life of his people would be unified and complete.

His gaze always looked to the fatherland. He ceaselessly sang the praises of Holy Etchmiadzin, the Christ-established spiritual center of the Armenian people. And he extolled Etchmiadzin’s exceptional importance and significance as the source *“from which heavenly rays flow forth to the entire Armenian Church; ... from which the ineffable ray and the shadowless light spread out.”*

Saint Nersess *Shnorhali*’s entire life and activity were focused on the glorification of God, and the urgent mission of leading the hearts of the people to Him. Preaching to the point of exhaustion, he taught the commandments of the Lord to the faithful: *“Arise, sons of light, to bless the Father of Light”*; *“We cry out the commandments of God as a watchman from a lofty watchtower in your hearing.”* The illustrious Catholicos shepherded the Armenian flock during difficult and tragic times, bearing great pain and affliction for many children of our exiled, wandering people. As a father he offered tender words of counsel to all – from prince to soldier and peasant; from bishop to priest, deacon and acolyte – thereby strengthening the faith of all, and nourishing all with knowledge.

His most soulful and beautiful creations were his odes and florid chants, with their unique flights of poetic imagination and their majestic musical style. These were directed toward the preservation of the national Christian identity of the Armenian people, and the elevation and crystallization of their spiritual and cultural life. His productive pen decorated the services of our Church, awakening the Christian soul and mind of our people. He cast light upon the rocky path of our history, and led our people to a bright horizon of spiritual and national rebirth.

In the international and ecumenical world, too, Saint Nersess enjoyed renown and recognition. Clergy and faithful in the Greek, Syriac, and Latin Christian realms were impressed by his intellectual prowess, and inspired by his virtuous life. Always finding refuge in the Lord's mercy, he made energetic efforts to promote loving cooperation among the churches. The saintly Catholicos became an evangelist for alleviating the age-old divisions separating the churches. And he became an apologist for the unity of the Christian world, defining the Armenian Church's position with the formula: *"In essential matters, Unity; in non-essential matters, Liberty; in all things, Charity."*

Beloved faithful: Generations of mankind have been illuminated by the example of resplendent deeds accomplished by the children of the Armenian nation. By renewing the memory of the most gifted Armenians – like Saint Nersess *Shnorhali* – by attending to their encouraging exhortations and counsel, our people have been empowered to face life's trials, to overcome suffering, and to elevate their spirits on the road to building a bright future. Likewise, the example of the Graceful Catholicos – *"crying out the commandments of God as a watchman from a lofty watchtower in your hearing"* – will inspire the faithful today, in accordance with the Apostle's command: *"In all things set an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness, and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned"* (Titus 2:7-8).

Now, with this Pontifical Encyclical, we invite our entire Holy Apostolic Church – its diocesan and national organizations, academic and intellectual institutions, charitable and patriotic concerns, and all our faithful people – to commemorate Saint Nersess *Shnorhali*'s eternal memory during this 850th anniversary year. Through conferences, publications, and celebrations, as well as in national and ecumenical circles, let us appreciate anew the eternally relevant message of this great teacher of the Christian faith, and benefactor of our national-religious life.

Before the Holy Altar of Descent, we pray that through the intercession of Saint Nersess *Shnorhali* of blessed memory, the 64th Catholicos of All Armenians, our beneficent Lord will protect our people under the shadow of His merciful hand, strengthening us in Faith, Hope, and Love, so we may overcome every difficulty of present life, and fulfill the luminous future of our national aspirations.

May the Lord grant peace and prosperity to our fatherland, and keep our holy, apostolic Armenian Church unshaken and bright, now and always. Amen.

With blessings,



KAREKIN II

Catholicos of All Armenians

*This Encyclical was delivered on March 3rd
In the Year of Our Lord 2023 and the Armenian Calendrical Year 1472
At the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.*