

IN MEMORY OF ARCHBISHOP SUMBAT LAPAJIAN

Your Eminence Archbishop Mushegh Mardirosian Prelate of Western United States and reverend Fathers, today we laid to rest Archbishop Sumbat Lapajian in the earth as a seed of immortality - our hearts are full of sadness, yet at the same time full of joyful hope and profound gratitude. Archbishop Lapajian faithfully followed the calling of his church and the word of the Lord.

In the name of the Prelacy Executive Council of the Armenian Apostolic Church of the Western United States, I thank all of you for being present to pay your final respects to Archbishop Lapajian. I wish to express my respects to the governmental officials and representatives of organizations who are present here today. I greet and thank all those who have expressed their condolences; especially the youth, whom Archbishop Lapajian liked to call the future and the hope of the Church. Our greetings are extended, moreover, to all those throughout the Armenian Community who are

united with us in spirit and prayer during this solemn occasion.

When describing his early childhood Archbishop Lapajian openly and simply stated in one sentence: "I lost my parents at a very young age and was raised in an orphanage." Today we can look back at his underprivileged beginning and still imagine a young boy sitting by a window of the Bird's Nest Orphanage that he shared with hundreds of other unfortunate boys, looking out to a world he could then himself only imagine. From those humble roots, like so many humble beginnings of our people after the calamity of the Genocide, grew the force of a driving dream; a dream of a little boy that led to a remarkable journey that ends here today, his dream began in a modest orphanage surrounded by the majestic Cedars of Lebanon now he has been laid to rest under the willowy Palm trees of Southern California.

Archbishop Lapajian's journey across the Armenian landscape mirrored that of his people during that remarkable

century, marked by death marches, displaced persons, refugees and orphans and the eventual independence of our nation. His life was bound up with the striving of our people, with our crises and our triumphs.

Archbishop Lapajian came to the United States at a time in the history of our community when Armenians here were tempted to say they had had enough of the old world. A lesser man would have resigned himself and accepted the circumstances he was faced with; not Father Lapajian.

Instead, he knew he had to reach out to the older established community and the new arrivals fleeing from the turmoil that fell on our communities in the Soviet Union, Middle East and Iran. He would not allow our people to quit their language, their culture, their political aspirations and most importantly their religion.

When Father Lapajian became the first Prelate of the Western United States, he took on challenges on various

matters from religious affairs and community organization to protection and preservation of the Armenian Cause “Hai Tahd”, putting the power of the church and the moral authority of his office behind those causes. He embraced his Holy Cross community like a father embraces his children.

He presided over the construction of the Genocide Monument in Montebello, the construction of this beautiful Cathedral and the opening of the Armenian Mesrobian School, these are but few of his many accomplishments.

Remarkably, he delivered thousands of sermons and made hundreds of appearances through out his career, both at Armenian and non Armenian events. I want to share two fond memories I have of Father Lapajian: my first meeting with him was when we were both guest speakers at an April 24th commemoration in 1967 at Los Angeles City College and some twenty years later in 1987 when we both invited to meet with Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa he

representing the Armenian Apostolic Church of the Western United States and I the Armenian National Committee of America (ANC), in each instance I was proud to be with such a capable representative of our church.

Even though he retired as Prelate he continued working in his community he so loved by writing and engaging us in his dialogue. For the past year, even in the final months of his life, he gave me his wise counsel, especially with regard to Armenia and particularly the Prelacy Executive Council and the National Assembly of the Armenian Church. One thing in particular left a profound impression on me. Though this man was in his eighth decade, he had an incredibly sharp and vigorous mind. As a public man, he always seemed to believe the greatest sin was remaining passive in the face of challenges, and he never stopped living by that creed. He gave of himself with intelligence, dignity and devotion to duty, and his entire congregation and community owes him a debt of gratitude for that service.

The enduring lesson of Archbishop Lapajian is that he never gave up being part of his church. He said many times that unless a person has a goal, a purpose, a new mountain to climb, his spirit will die. Well, based on our last meeting just a few months ago, I can say that his spirit was very much alive to the very end.

That is a great tribute to him, to his religious brothers, to his church, to his family and most importantly to the Armenian community of Montebello whose love he so depended on and whose love he returned in full measure. Today is a day for his religious family and for his nation to remember Archbishop Sumbat Lapajian's life in totality. To them, let us say: may he rest in peace.

May we heed his call to maintain the will and the wisdom to build on Armenia's greatest gift, its freedom, and to lead a world full of difficulty to the just and lasting peace he dreamed of for his people.

As it is written in the words of a church hymn, "Grant that I may realize that the little things in life create differences, but that in the higher things we are all one." In the twilight of his life, Archbishop Lapajian knew that lesson well. It is, I feel, certainly a principle he would want us all to keep.

And so, on behalf of the Prelacy Executive Council of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and on behalf of a grateful church and a people, we bid farewell to Archbishop Sumbat Lapajian.

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