

THE WORD OF GOD: Choosing Discipleship

Lesson 23. Red Sunday

Bible Study Preparation and Materials Needed:

Reading of the day: John 5:19-30

Prepare Ahead: The background section is material for the instructor and is not meant to be used word for word. The answers to the Bible Study discussion questions are provided for informational purposes and can be read aloud and shared verbally.

References:

www.vemkar.us

Orthodox Study Bible

Memory Verse:

“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth.”

- John 5:28-29

Bible Study Lesson

Open with prayer:

Իմաստութիւն Յօր՝ Յիսուս, տո՛ւր ինձ իմաստութիւն, զբարիս խորհել եւ խօսել եւ գործել առաջի Քո՝ յամենայն ժամ. ի չար խորհրդոց, ի բանից եւ ի գործոց փրկեա՛ զիս. եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Eemasdootyoon Hor Heesoos, door eents eemasdootyoon uzparees khorel yev khosel yev kordz arachi ko hamenayn jham. Ee char khorhrtos, ee paneets yev kordzots prgya zees yev voghormya ko araradzots eents pazmameghees. Amen.

Wisdom of the Father, O Jesus, grant to me the wisdom to think, speak, and do that which is good in Your sight. Save me from all evil and distracting thoughts, words, and deeds. Have mercy upon your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.

For Students

Red Sunday (John 5:19-30)

19 Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. 20 For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.

21 For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. 22 For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, 23 that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

24 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. 25 Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. 26 For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, 27 and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.

28 Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice 29 and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. 30 I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.”

Questions:

1. *Although there seems to be no ecclesiastical origin or significance for Red Sunday, the color red has numerous themes within Christianity and the Armenian Church. What are some you can think of?*
2. *This Gospel reading is read at the burial service in the Armenian Church. Why do you think our Church Fathers decided this to be the reading? What comfort does it convey to those who are grieving?*
3. *What is a martyr and how are we called to be martyrs?*
4. *It is no coincidence that this reading is associated with Red Sunday and is usually around the time of April 24 when we remember and celebrate the Holy Martyrs of the Genocide. Why do we celebrate their martyrdom? Why do we no longer grieve or mourn the Genocide martyrs?*
5. *What does it mean that the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live? (John 5:28-29)*
6. *What are “these” in John 5:20?*
7. *What does it mean to “have done good” (John 5:29)?*
8. *Why does Jesus say, “I can do nothing by Myself” (John 5:30)?*

For the Teacher

Background:

The ascription “Red” traditionally is thought to reflect the brilliance of red flowers, which burst forth in bloom at this time of year symbolizing the new life given through the blood sacrifice of Christ. The Gospel of John 5:19-30, emphasizes the life-giving word of Jesus. Like Green Sunday, it has become a custom on this Sunday for clerics to wear red vestments and for the church to be decorated in red.

The name “*Red Sunday*” seems to have no ecclesiastical origin or significance but may have been, like Green Sunday, a popular designation related to a spring festival and the new season, since at that time of the year the fields were adorned with red and green.

Questions:

1. **Although there seems to be no ecclesiastical origin or significance for Red Sunday, the color red has numerous themes within Christianity and the Armenian Church. What are some you can think of?**

Red represents many things, such as the blood of Christ, the blood of the martyrs and the color of wine, just to name a few. Until today in Jerusalem, on the feasts of the martyrs, the celebrant and the churches are adorned in red.

2. **This Gospel reading is read at the burial service in the Armenian Church. Why do you think our Church Fathers decided this to be the reading? What comfort does it convey to those who are grieving?**

This Gospel teaches two important truths to the listeners. First, it reminds the listeners that Jesus is more than just His teachings. Many religions and individual beliefs around the world consider Jesus to be a prophet, a good teacher, and someone to respect, but Jesus is not just an enlightened teacher. Rather His *divine* teachings cannot be separated from who He *divinely* is – God. And as the Son of God, He calls us to follow Him as friends (see John 15:15). As friends, He wants to spend time with us. He wants our love in return, our entire being. He wants to *commune* with us in good times and in times of sorrow.

Second, the Gospel reading comforts the listeners with the truth that the dead will rise again and come out of the graves. This is not only comforting that the one who is being buried will come back to life, but that we too, the listeners of the Gospel, will resurrect from the dead. However, at the same time, this reading is also a warning and reminder, that we will all rise from the dead, but some to everlasting life and some to eternal condemnation, depending on how we lived our lives.

3. **What is a martyr and how are we called to be martyrs?**

In a way, on this Red Sunday, and every day, we are called to martyrdom. The demand of the Gospel, the demand of our faith compels us to imitate Jesus’ complete and total surrender to the Father’s loving care, no matter the cost, even unto death.

This is good news in a world that regularly spills blood in the name of ego, politics, and false religion. A world that is still filled with injustice, imbalance, unfairness, and terror. And so, the color red reminds us of our pain, distress, fear, and suffering, but as St. Paul assures us, the love of Christ and his work at the Cross is the last word on the topic of evil and death:

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, ‘For thy sake we are being killed all day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:35-39)

4. **It is no coincidence that this reading is associated with Red Sunday and is usually around the time of April 24 when we remember and celebrate the Holy Martyrs of the Genocide. Why do we celebrate their martyrdom? Why do we no longer grieve or mourn the Genocide martyrs?**

There are many paradoxes in our Christian faith. God is able to take those things that to world seem horrible and make them into blessings. Behold, the Holy Cross, the greatest of all paradoxes. St. Paul writes, *“For Jews ask*

for signs, Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews, and foolishness to Greeks” (1 Corinthians 1:22-23).

This is true also with martyrdom. The Armenian Genocide was a horrible time for our nation, the Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire and our ancestors. However, their willingness to die for their faith and not deny Christ allowed them to receive the crowns of martyrdom, just like St. Stephen the first martyr (Acts 7). We celebrate their martyrdom just as we celebrate the martyrdom of other saints, like St. Vartan. St. Vartan and his companions were holy men and women who were willing to lay down their lives for Christ and the Christian faith. Our Holy Martyrs of the Genocide followed St. Vartan’s example.

As such, we no longer cry for them or mourn their loss, but celebrate their victory over death and this world. It is through martyrdom that the Church and our faith grows (remember, this is a paradox, but true).

Tertullian, an early Church Father of the late second century writes, *“the seed of the Church is the blood of the martyrs.”* This means that as the Church is persecuted, it grows and attracts new converts to the faith (we see this in the Forty Martyrs of Sebastia). The world says, *“If we persecute the Christians, they will deny their faith and if they die, Christians will go away.”* However, this is not what happens. The Church grows and more and more people become Christians. This is why we do not grieve or mourn the Holy Martyrs of the Genocide, but celebrate them because, through them, the Church and the Christian faith has grown.

5. What does it mean that the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live? (John 5:28-29)

The dead refers both to the spiritually dead, who will find life in Christ, and to the physically dead, who will rise in the general resurrection. Christ confirms this statement by raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:38-44) before going to His own death.

Many people do not realize that when Christ returns to earth at His Second Coming, which will be a physical return not a spiritual one, He will resurrect all the dead. That means everyone will come back to life. Unfortunately, in today’s world, people are under the impression that when we die, our soul goes to heaven and we become angels or some spiritual being, living forever like that. Neither the Church nor Christ Himself ever taught this.

In fact, when we die, our souls fall into a slumber or sleeping state – this is why we in Armenian, call those who have died ննչեցեալ or հաւնդնցեալ (nunchetsyal or hankootsyal), one who sleeps/one who is at rest. This reaffirms the belief that when we die, we fall asleep and when Christ returns, we awaken, coming back to life in the new creation which Christ will make. Death is not eternal, but temporary and the beginning of eternal life.

Remember that we always talk about eternal life with the understanding that that life will be a physical life, not a spiritual one. Our bodies in this world can become old and decrepit, through sickness and sin, but when Christ returns and the dead (we) hear the voice of the Son of God, we will come out of the tombs and graves and our bodies will never be able to decay or fall sick again, but will be eternal.

6. What are “these” in John 5:20?

To understand what “these” refers to, we must read the previous passage John 5:1-15. Christ heals a paralytic on the Sabbath and the Pharisees are upset that He did this. They seek to kill Him, but more because He claims to be the Son of God and making Himself equal to God (John 5:17-18). When Christ speaks to the Pharisees and tell them that *“He will show Him greater works than **these**, that you may marvel,”* Christ is talking about the miracles He has already performed.

As we read the Gospel of John, we see that the many miracles and signs Christ performs are increasingly more impressive (feeding five thousand people, walking on water, healing a man born blind from birth, and raising the dead) and people marvel even more. It does not end there, though. Christ still performs miracles in our lives today, so much so that we even marvel and are amazed at those miracles.

7. What does it mean to “have done good” (John 5:29)?

There is a belief in modern Christianity that all one needs to do to be saved is to believe in Christ. This is true, but there is more to that. It is not just as simple to say *“I believe”* and then resurrect to life. Christ even says, *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 7:21).

True belief in the Orthodox Church is not a psychological moment in time, but a way of life, how we live and what we do. This does not mean that our works can save us, but they are testimony to our faith in Christ.

“*Have done good*” refers to those who have lived a God-pleasing life, doing the will of our Heavenly Father. This entails loving our enemies, forgiving those who harm us, defending the defenseless, caring for the needy, and participating in liturgical life of the Church – the Body of Christ. Doing good is exactly what the demons do not want us to do. They want us to do evil and the opposite of God’s will.

8. Why does Jesus say, “I can do nothing by Myself” (John 5:30)?

When Jesus declares God to be My Father, the Jews clearly understand this implies absolute equality (vv. 17, 18). That the Son can do nothing of Himself (v. 19) proves that His every act and word is in complete unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit. This discourse reveals that the Father and the Son are completely united in nature, will, and action. Thus, the Son fully shares the divine attributes of both giving life and executing judgment. Christ’s judgment (v. 22) is based on both faith (v. 24) and works (v. 29).

Close with prayer:

Պահապան ամենայնի քրիստոս, աջ Քո հովանի լիցի ի վերայ իմ, ի տուէ եւ ի գիշերի, ի նստիլ ի տան, ի գնալ ի ծանապարհ, ի ննջել եւ ի յառնել, զի մի երբեք սասանեցայց եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Bahaban amenayn Kreesdos, ach Ko hovanee leetsee ee vera eem; ee dveh yev ee keesheree, ee nsdeel ee dan, ee knal ee janabarh, ee nunchel yev ee harnel, zee mee yerpek sasanetsayts yev voghormya Ko araradzots yev eents pazmamyghees. Amen.

O Christ, guardian of all, let Your right hand guard and shelter me, by day and by night, at home and abroad, in sleeping and in waking, that I may never stumble. Have mercy upon Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.

At Home

Please complete the assignment by next class.

Memory Verse:

“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth.”
(John 5:28-29)