

Fr. Aren e-mail II
Sat 1/19/2008 5:15 AM

Well, I don't know where to begin. There is so much going on. It's January 18, 2008 Armenian Christmas Eve and I'm waiting for Margos Srpazan to return so that I can go to Yerevan and pick-up my Palm Treo and check my e-mail at Arlex, Dr. Tom Samuelian's office. I'm also hoping to visit my good friend Dr. Garen Koloian whose mother died yesterday. He's been a great source of strength over the many years I've known him. I'm also hoping to get to Etchmiadzin to attend the engagement ceremony of one of the girls from Mer Doon. A project which Julie Ashekian and Dr. Garo Garibian have set up for young girls without a home. The work that they are doing there to keep these girls off the streets is amazing. They have created a safe and loving environment for them. Some of the girls come from orphanages, however once they turn a certain age, they must leave the orphanage and some end up on the streets. Mer Doon has saved these girls lives.

No change in the weather situation, it's still cold, but at least it has not snowed since Armenian Christmas. Last night I needed to turn on the second heater in my apartment since it was getting too cold to sleep. Electricity is definitely not the first choice for heating an apartment or building. Natural Gas is the way to go in Armenia. In fact many of the cars now run on Natural Gas, it's much cheaper and much cleaner for the environment. So some may be wondering just how expensive gas is here in Armenia. Well, in Yerevan it's about 400 Dram/Litre. So do the math. I gallon is 3.75 Litres. And the average rate of the dollar/dram is 305. So if I did the math correctly it's about \$4.91/Gallon. As I'm sitting here writing the power went off in the diocese but it's 1:00PM so light is not an issue and the two rooms in the diocese are heated by Natural Gas.

In the past week I celebrated a wedding in Hatsarad. A young couple who got married just a few days ago. It's difficult to understand if they get any of the ceremony at all. It's difficult to know since for most of the people this is all new. Thank God that they are at least coming to church for a wedding. Sometimes they just drive around the church three times, honk their horns, get out, go into the church, light a candle and walk out and to some this is a "church" wedding.

Oh, by the way, the electricity came back on.

This past Wednesday, I spent time in the Hatsarad church where they have a weekly gathering for the faithful, and even for those of little faith. The number has grown since the last time I met with them, with more young people coming. This week there were about 30 young people and Mayrigrs who came. They want to know the answer to simple questions like why we celebrate Christmas when we do, or why does Easter change from year to year. We spoke about the Divine Liturgy and that it's more than just background activity for those who wish to come to church and light a candle and walk out. The list goes on and on...

This past Tuesday I met with the local youth group here in Gavar. Not much bigger than my group back in Chicago. It's strange for me, but not for them, to be a member of a Christian Youth Group, but not be baptized...it just does not seem that important to them.

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I'm not sure if they're just waiting for something better to come along or if it just is not a priority. I encouraged them to prepare themselves and possibly be baptized together later this Spring. They seemed to like the idea. We're meeting again next Tuesday.

I have to tell this story, it's one I've been telling to some family and friends back in the states but it kind of gives you an idea of what I'm facing over here in terms of just simple approach to problems and challenges. Last Sunday Margos Srpazan asked me to celebrate Divine Liturgy. I've told you before how cold the church is. Well half-way through the Divine Liturgy I could not feel my feet even though I had worn wool sox. It felt as though my feet had turned into two bricks. Well, for those who follow the Armenian Divine Liturgy closely, there is a point called the "fraction" right before the priest says, "Arek, gerek, ays eh marmin im..." and he tears the four sides of the blessed host. Well, as I was trying to tear the "Nshkhar" or host, it started to break. I was upset that the local priest Fr. Knel had given me a dried-up "Nshkhar". Following Divine Liturgy, I approached him as said that I would provide him with plastic bags so that when he made the Nshkahars he could keep them moist in the plastic bags. He turned to me and began to laugh and said that he had made that Nshkhar early Sunday Morning and that it was quite fresh. He informed me that the Nshkhar had frozen and that I need to blow on it with my breath in order to thaw it out and make it soft again...life as a priest in Gavar!

Well, since my last entry it is now 12:00AM and I just finished my letter to Dn. Vahe who is being ordained to the holy priesthood in Richmond, VA. Bishop Margos is still in Yerevan and did not send his driver to take me to Yerevan to take care of some business so I'm still in Gavar. As I was finishing, the power went out and it's starting to get cold. I'll hopefully be sending this tomorrow, along with the letter from the St. Gregory Community, from the University of Gavar which is not too far away. They have the ability to send and receive e-mail through a radio wave system. It is still pretty primitive and there is still no DSL line here in the city.

As the temperature goes down and the one candle I have starts to burn down, I need to finish and get into bed to stay warm.

I pray for you all and trust that you all pray for me.

With love and prayers,

fr. Aren

P.S. The reason I'm able to finish this is that my laptop battery was charged.

P.P.S. It's Saturday January 19th and I've made my way to Yerevan where I'm able to send this e-mail from the Diocese in Yerevan. There is a lot of hubub around here because on Monday we celebrate the Feast of St. Sarkis. I've been invited by Archbishop Navasart to be at the special concert that evening at the Opera. To those of you wondering, the electricity came back on around 4:00AM.

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My father is doing well, and again please pass this on to whomever you feel would like to read this.

You are free to call and shortly I'll be able to get and receive text messages
011-374-94-24-19-66