

St. Vartan and the Battle of Avarayr (451 A.D.)



“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that

neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, 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 NRSV

St Vartan (Mamigonian) whose lineage is traced to St. Gregory the Illuminator, along with over 1000 soldiers, clergy, and companions, led the resistance to the more powerful and larger Persian army to defend the Christian faith of the Armenian people. Because zeal was growing to accept the Good News of Jesus Christ among Armenians, the political situation in Armenia during the mid-5th century made it increasingly difficult for Christians to practice their faith. The Persian ruler, King Yazdigerd II, ruthlessly and fanatically opposed Christianity. He demanded that the Armenian people abandon their religion and submit to the pagan Persian religion (Zoroastrianism) and its worship of fire.

St. Vartan refused on behalf of the Armenian faithful. An inspired leader, he believed that one cannot serve one’s people without serving Christ at the same time. Thus he responded to Yazdigerd II with a declaration of faith. His words from Romans (see above) oftentimes accompany images of him. On

May 26, 451AD on the Avarayr Plain in Artaz, Vaspurakan, the Persian army, 200,000 strong, waged a powerful, bloody war upon the Armenians who numbered 66,000; and although St. Vartan and his soldiers perished, a few survivors remained to use guerrilla tactics. By 484 the Persians finally signed the Nvarsak Treaty which affirmed Armenia's right to practice Christianity freely. *This is an historic moment because it marked the first time in world history that a people were free to worship as those choose.*

The Feast of Vartanantz, commemorated on the Thursday preceding Great Lent, is both a religious and nationalistic one. It is a symbol of the conscience, the faith, and the general rebellion of Armenians against tyranny, and their effort to preserve their identity and freedom. Although St. Vartan, as leader and patriot emerged as the most revered figure; the many other commanders, priests, and companions who lost their lives are also remembered on this feast day for their martyrdom. Many churches throughout the Diaspora have been named after the Vartanian saints, including our parish of St. Leon and the St. Vartan Armenian Cathedral in New York City. In Yerevan, an inspiring statue of St. Vartan, mounted on his horse, stands on a main thoroughfare, a continuing presence in the life of Armenians.

Cameo window in the South Apse reads: In Loving Memory of Grandparents Nazareth and Siranoush Boyajian by Ara and Lorig Chorluyan, David and Ani Kasparian, Michael and Nancy Kasparian

Adapted by Ruth Bedevian from the following source:

<http://www.armenianchurch-ed.net/feasts/st-vartan-the-warrior/the-battle-of-vartanantz/>