

Whose Mark Do We Bear?

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Romans 8:31-39; Revelations 20:4

“They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had or received his mark on their foreheads or their hands” (Rev. 20:4).

The verse we just read is quoted from the Book of Revelation. Apostle John wrote down his vision of the Judgment Day. He described people who suffered and lost their lives for the witness of their Lord Jesus Christ, who refused to worship the beast or his image, and who did not compromise their faith. This cost them their lives and they were given the glorious crown.

Today, 1567 years later, we celebrate the memory of Vartan and his friends. Even though thousands fell on that day in the Battle of Avarayr, yet this is a **feast and not mourning day**. It is a feast because what happened in the Battle of Avarayr was not an end as the Persians thought it would be. It was a beginning, a continuation of what **Thaddeus, Bartholomew, and St.Krikor Lousavorich** sowed into the hearts of the Armenian people.

There are **150 years** between 301 and 451 AD, i.e. between the Armenians accepting Christianity and being **ready to die** for their **faith**. They were not willing to bow to the “beast” and accept his “mark.” Christianity had become real in their lives. It was so genuine that they were ready to die for their faith.

Martyrdom is a life of testimony. Armenians had learned and were educated in their faith specially when, by the invention of the **Armenian Alphabet in 405 AD**, they were able to worship and read the Bible in their mother tongue. The Armenians had learned that Christ would set them free from sin and this new life had changed them. They wanted to live with the freedom to worship the God they loved.

So what to do with this historical fact? What do we learn from these martyrs today?

1. Vartan and his friends bore marks:

In his speech, Vartan mentioned the marks they bore on their bodies:

“Each of us carries numerous injuries and scars on our bodies ...”

Whose mark do we bear today? Whose impact shows in our lives? We often meet people who have a tattoo on their body as a sign or a remembrance of something special for them. Some wear crosses as a symbol of their faith. However, Vartan says, ***“...those courageous acts I count useless because all of them will vanish.”***

Vartan and his friends carried the scars of war. For Vartan, those were useless because they would fade away.

The Christian mark that Vartan and his friends bore was their **testimonial life**. A life that **was ready to say NO** to the Persian gods and **YES to Jesus Christ**.

When Jesus rose, he appeared to his disciples, and to Thomas who doubted. Jesus showed him his hands. There were scars on his hands, the sign of the Son of God becoming a sacrifice for the salvation of humanity.

So what is our mark? Whose mark do we bear?
What is our Christian testimony today?

When we celebrate Vartanantz, it should lead us to **examine ourselves** and ask ourselves

“Am I being a witness for Christ? Does my life reflect Vartan’s loyalty to Jesus Christ?”

Today in the US, generally speaking, we are not persecuted for our faith. But this does not mean sometimes the “world”, the jobs, the market, will not push us to compromise our faith and values.

It will be good to ask ourselves, whose mark do we bear?
Whom do we obey in our daily life decisions?

Standing firm in our Christian faith and values has an important part in being the witnesses of Jesus in the world.

Two words are important: testimonial life.

2. Vartan and his friends chose the best way to express Love towards God and their Country.

Love is an important word these days in our lives. Just in a few days we will celebrate Valentine's Day. It is nice, romantic and exciting.

Unfortunately, to love, or the definition of love has become very shallow and selfish.

These days to love means, "What's in it for me? What do I gain from this relationship?"

Christ taught us how to love. The best way to understand God's love (agape) is to see how much you are ready to sacrifice. I once heard someone asking, "How do you spell LOVE?" And the answer is "GIVE."

Jesus described love like this:

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13 ESV)

You are not really convinced of the value of something, until you are ready to die for it. What has ultimate value for you that you are ready to die for?

Find the answer of this question. Deal with it. It will tell you where your priorities are. It will measure how much love one has for a cause, a person, God, family and the country...

Vartan and his friends said: "**Vasn Krisdosi, Vasn Hayrenyatz**" "For Christ and for the Homeland." **It is an affirmative choice.**

That is the Mark of Vartan, to be a witness for Jesus.

The challenge is continuing with us today after 1567 years. Today we lost somehow the ZEAL that Vartan and his friends had: **the ZEAL to serve God and be witnesses.**

But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15)

The story of pastor Haig Hovspeian. Martyred in Iran for his faith.

Let us examine today whose mark to de we bear?

Let us follow the steps of Vartan and his friends without compromise, saying: Vasn Krisdosi, Vasn Hayrenyats.

