

BE YOUR OWN RECOMMENDATION

And you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.-2 Cor 3:3

How do you prove who someone really is? That is the question Republicans and Democrats will spend 100s of millions of dollars trying to answer in the next month ahead of the 2018 midterm elections, with control of the House and possibly the Senate at stake. The most expensive Senate race in the country thusfar happens to be in our backyard, with Republican Rick Scott squaring off against Democrat Bill Nelson. These two-and their proxy groups-spent almost 50 million dollars campaigning before they even won their primary elections this Tuesday! Where is all the money going? Well, to advertising essentially. Because sadly, they usually don't take the time-and we usually don't take the time-to understand their character, reflected in years of tough decisions on complicated policies. Instead we take shortcuts. It's too hard to explain who you are and what you've done, it's much quicker and easier to spend a few million dollars portraying how bad your opponent is. It's too long and slow to let the people you've effected by your decisions be your recommendation, it's quicker and easier to hire some celebrity to endorse you.

Well there has to be a better way to get to know the character of someone in leadership than wasting all this money on endorsement and advertising. In today's reading, the Apostle Paul has recognized the same difficult problem in his leadership, and points to a beautifully simple solution. Paul has helped build the new church community of Corinth in Greece over the years, but apparently some new people in the Corinth community don't know Paul or his character. The suggestion had been tossed around about getting references and recommendation letters. Paul's rejection of that suggestion, and his better way of judging character, is a God-inspired reminder for us all.

"Do we need," Paul asks, "as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you?"(No) "You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on your hearts, to be known and read by all men; and you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." Here we have a simple and beautiful repudiation of the branding, endorsement and spin that has taken over our society, and not just the political realm! Let's not waste our time, Paul seems to be saying, boosting up our credentials so we can appear to be a greater expert, to posture, to play off the recommendations of our friends. Who we are and what we have done can be seen all around you and even within you, for people with eyes to see and ears to hear. "For we are not peddlers of God's word (salesmen) like so many;" Paul continues, "but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence." You can't buy and sell truth, reminds Paul, goodness and integrity, though humble and reserved, are real-and you either have them or you don't.

So put away those endorsements and recommendations, advises Paul, the testimony of our actions and our character always speak for themselves. We are our own recommendation, for good or for bad. The U.S. Representative of Florida's 12th congressional district, Gus Bilirakis, is also up for election to the House this year. Though I confess I don't have a deep understanding of his policies and decisions, and certainly Fr. Hovnan's opinion is far from a celebrity endorsement, I will share that on multiple occasions this man gave his time to be with our small community of Armenians, and spoke from his heart on issues important to us. He is his own recommendation, and to me his actions and care speak louder than any possible commercial or endorsement. Paul's message to us today is that we too are our own recommendation, a hidden power that runs deeper than the political realm, and is centered in our very being.

So let us reflect today on how the recommendation letter of our daily actions and decisions might read. Putting aside the good that friends would say and the best self-image we curate on social media, how would God read the character and actions of our lives? What impression would a non-Christian get reading our behavior as Christians? What would a person who just moved here, read from us about the character of the St. Hagop Church Community? This is the only true recommendation we are writing, which whether we realize it or not, people are reading off of us. As St. Francis of Assisi famously said, let us "Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words." For regardless of what we want others to believe about us, the character of our life is what they will read...Letters written with God and for God, on the tablets of our souls, and it his endorsement alone which abides, now and always and unto the age of ages amen.