

“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?

(2 Corinthians 13:5)

Once there was a hunter who for many years used to hunt birds with the help of his sling. Every time before hunting, he used to go to the nearest river bank and choose very beautiful round stones for hunting. One day at the end of hunting, he was very happy, because he succeeded and caught some birds. A few days later, the hunter went to the nearest city, and suddenly he noticed that there were some stones in his pocket from the previous day. He took them out from his pocket and began playing with them. Later, passing through the market, a person who was a jeweler noticed that the stones in the hunter’s hand were priceless. The jeweler suggested buying all the stones, because he saw the beauty and the unique quality of the stones. The hunter willingly sold all the remaining stones, but he had sorrow in his heart, because if he had not used the stones for hunting birds, now he would have much more money to spend.

In today’s Epistle reading we read how the Apostle Paul instructs the Corinthians saying, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? Today’s story and today’s Epistle reading have a significant connection to our life today. As stewards of God, we are given many opportunities and talents to use and make a profit both for our physical and spiritual needs because God wants us to be productive in both ways.

In my life, I was given many gifts. The one that is very significant for me was the opportunity to study and live in the Holy Land for eight years. Why Jerusalem, many of you would ask? Because living in Jerusalem and serving in the holy places where the Son of God lived, was crucified, buried and resurrected, gave me the idea of stewardship of time. That valuable 24 hours a day that only I and you can spend. Depending on our profession, our time may be worth hundreds of dollars an hour. On the other hand, our relatives, friends and children need our time, helping shape their lives by word and by example. The time we give to someone is an investment in their lives that is not wasted. In other words, the time we give to one another has a value and whatever good we do in this life, God is going to compensate us on the Last Day.

As Christians, it is also important to value the time we spend at church, in worship, service and activities. Every member of the Body of Christ plays a role, according to their gifts, in the life of their church. The church is a place where people of faith gather for worship, fellowship and service. Most importantly, we gather together in worship, praising and thanking God for the blessings in our lives and hearing His Word. Of the 168 hours in every week with which we have been blessed, we offer back the short time we spend in church on Sunday morning. In addition, we may also devote a few hours a week to bring our humble and spiritually prolific investment gathered together as the Body of Christ. In doing so, we become united in prayer and united in Holy Communion. We become his hands and feet carrying out His work in the world. As we offer ourselves and our time as His Church, we are part of something much bigger than we can imagine – much bigger than the project we support, the service we provide, the prayer we offer.

The time we give to another person has its price. However, the time we give to Church is priceless. In today's story the hunter failed because he could not use the stones intelligently. Even though he hunted some birds, he wasted his priceless stones on hunting. The stones of today's story signify the time we are given. Our time then is a priceless gift given to us from God. If we use our time for our physical needs or for our relatives, friends or for someone else it is good and valuable, but it becomes priceless when we use it for the church, for the Body of Christ.

Today, the Apostle Paul calls us to examine ourselves and see whether we are using our life, our time and our treasure for good and everlasting purposes or not. He reminds us that we are given endless opportunities to serve not only each other but also to bring our humble service inside of this church or outside of it by building up the Body of Christ. In doing so, we will become productive and trustworthy servants of God and He will praise us when He comes with His glory and makes us the inheritors of the coming Kingdom, Amen.