

First, a story. A kindly grandmother, who no longer watched much TV, or kept up with the passing trends, had no idea what to buy for her family one year so she decided that choosing gifts was just too much trouble. She wrote out a check for each loved one, and she inscribed on plain little cards, "Buy your own presents." That's sweet, but weeks later, she found all those checks unmailed, hidden up under some catalogs, but she had sent the cards. What her loved ones actually received were empty cards, which said, "Buy your own present!"

Empty, empty mocking words if they remain words alone. Now, personal consecration is a time when you can come forward, and you can kneel if you wish, and we can do it in an organized way. We'll have the choir with the opportunity first. You can kneel. You can stand where you are, or you can come stand near the altar, if you wish. You prayerfully decided just how much flesh you are willing to put on the bones of the words, "I belong to God."

Personal consecration is more appropriate at Christmas than any other time of year. Why? Because this is a season in which we celebrate and take joy in giving. To consecrate simply and profoundly means to set apart for God's use. Now, personal consecration sounds like a high-flying term, but it is something even a child can understand. How much of me belongs to God? We like to say, without thinking about it much, that, of course, all of me belongs to God.

Let's listen to the Apostle Paul. He says in Galatians, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." You see, Paul's words indicate complete surrender. How do we approach and in what ways do we surrender ourselves and our desires and our time and our talents and our treasures to God? Words are not enough. So the question of personal consecration becomes how do I show in personal, tangible ways that I belong to God? We've moved beyond the Old Testament ways where you brought the best of your flock and the best of your crops, and you sacrificed it on the altar. What we are to do is to give the best of ourselves. A tithe of riches and perhaps more. A tithe of time and service to others through the church and perhaps more. A tithe of your talents used for God. An intentional stewardship of your health by caring for the body that God gave you to live in.

Today, we have the opportunity to come forward or to stand in place, and to consecrate in a personal and private and prayerful way our time, our talents, our treasures, and our bodies for God's use. More than words, in fact, it is a covenant between you and God. You keep the card that we sent you in your pocketbook or at home. You use the magnet that we sent to you to put it on your refrigerator or your microwave or your file cabinet to remind you of your personal covenant with God. You bring nothing forward but yourself and your prayerful submission of your time, talent, treasure, and care for your body. You bring only yourself. You bring no card this year, only yourself.

Personal Consecration Service
The Reverend James D. Dennis, Jr.
December 18, 2005

2

Today, we consider what we will bring and set apart for God's use, and I ask you as we prepare to do that to please turn to #607 in your hymnal. This is not in your bulletin, but please turn to #607 in your hymnal, and we will begin in this way, and then I will ask the ushers, I will first direct the choir to come forward on one side, then go up the other side, and be seated. I'll ask the ushers to come forward and give each row, in turn, the opportunity to come forward for prayer. We will have music playing during this time. If you wish to stand in place, that is fine. If you wish to come forward, that is fine. Bring only yourself and a prayerful concern for commitment to God in the coming year.

Join me in #607. Let us read in unison the Covenant prayer.

I am no longer my own, but thine.

Put me to what thou wilt.

Rank me with whom thou wilt.

Put me to doing.

Put me to suffering.

Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee or brought low by thee.

Let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal, and now, Oh Glorious and Blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thou are mine and I am thine.

So be it, and the covenant, which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in Heaven.

Amen.