

2022 C 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary time Sept. 18

Arthur Barry in 1920's, the greatest Jewel thief of all time. He committed more than 150 robberies stealing millions of dollars-worth of jewelry only from the rich. Few times he was caught in the act of robbery, he talked to his victims out of reporting the crime. However, the law finally caught up with him and he served 18 years of jail time. As he stepped out of the jail after his jail time he said, "**I'm never going to do this anymore.**" He kept his word. He settled in a small New England town and worked at a restaurant and lived a model life.

Eventually, however, the word got out that Arthur Barry, the famous jewel thief where about? One of the reporters who met him and asked a penetrating question of all, "Mr. Barry! in all the robberies, I 'm curious to know, the No. 1 robbery of all from whom you stole the most?"

Barry, without a moment's hesitation said, "That's easy. **The man from whom I stole the most was ... Arthur Barry.** I could have been a successful businessman. A baron on Wall Street and contributing member to society but instead, I chose the life a thief and spent one-thirds of my adult life behind prison bars." Yes, Arthur Barry was truly the thief who stole the most from people is, ... from himself.

Here is a question for each of us this day: Could we come to the end of our lives and conclude that **we robbed ourselves of the opportunity to make our lives count?** Could we conclude our lives have been largely wasted and there is no point of living? Is there a way whereby we can know that our lives really matter?

I don't believe that anyone would have charged St. Paul with having wasted his life. He was charged with many other things. He was beaten and thrown into prisons few times for confronting authorities, and religious. But never could he have been charged with wasting his life. Instead, he made enormous contribution to human life.

It was Paul who took **the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles.** It was Paul who gave us the beautiful **description of love** ever written in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians. It was Paul who gave us the **definition of life and death** in 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 15. Paul was certainly one of the most influential people who ever lived.

The secret of his purposeful and powerful life is found in his words from today's reading from his 1st letter to Timothy. "For there is **ONE GOD**, and there is **ONE MEDIATOR** between God and men, **JESUS CHRIST**, who gave himself as ransom for all. For this I am appointed as preacher and Apostle to the Gentiles in faith and truth."

Consider for a moment that first clause; "**For there is one God ...**" For you and I take that truth for granted, but not the writers of the Bible. They knew what a struggle it had been for their fathers to come to declare that truth. Their neighbors worshiped many gods.

Yet, they declared the **unity** of God. They declared the **universality** of God. Yahweh is the God of creation who created of all that lives, moves, and has its being (Acts 17:28). But even more importantly, they declared his **unique intimacy with the world he created**. Yahweh was no remote god who created a world and then forgotten it. But He was **involved in the life of his people** in a very personal way.

God's ultimate cure for the common life takes you to the manger. The babe of Bethlehem was called Immanuel which means, "God with us." He is not a God above us or away from us. But "God, with us, who came to feel with us." God with us. Prophets weren't enough. Apostles wouldn't do. Angels won't suffice. God sent more than miracles and messages. He sent himself. He sent his Son. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" Jn 1: 1-14.

A woman found herself broke, drunk, depressed, and addicted to drugs. Desperate, she approached a priest and told, "**I'm so messed up that I don't think God could love me.**" The priest replied, "**God has to love you. That's God's job.**" That's true. God's job is to love us. Why? Because in 1 John 4:8 we are told, **God is love.**" That's his nature. He is intimately involved with His world and in the lives of each of his children.

"There is one God," declares Paul. Then he adds, "**there is one mediator between God and men, the man JESUS CHRIST**, who gave himself as ransom for all." We have moved now from universal God to specific. This is the unique claim of us, Christians. Jewish God was a God whose glory could not even be properly contemplated by mere mortals.

St. Paul's life was grounded in his knowledge, grace and power of God in Christ, crucified and risen from the dead. And he totally dedicated himself to a single cause-- **to glorify God**. Whether he was making tents or writing to the churches, preaching on the street corners--the object was the same. And my friends, that is your task and my task as well. To do everything at home, at work, classroom or wherever—to do it to the glory of God.

Secondly, Paul saw himself as a **channel through which God's purpose and power to flow**. He always felt **the powerful hand of God behind his work**. And that power was the Holy Spirit. He was the funnel for that power.

There was a story in Reader's Digest few years ago about one member of the family that provides the go-power for their family. He said, "My wife Donna, is the spark plug who makes sure the kids are up on time to eat and get ready to catch the school bus. One day she had an early meeting and left the house while rest of us were sleeping. By the time the kids and dragged ourselves out of bed and through our morning routine, we were late. My daughter and son wanted notes for their teacher, excusing for their tardiness. 'Okay,' I said, 'but what's the reason?' After some discussion we settled on this explanation: 'Please excuse the lateness. Our power went out early this morning.'"

Well, they told the truth. Mom was the power in their family, and she had left early that morning. In the same way, the power that helped St. Paul accomplished the things very few people ever did accomplish. That power was the power of the Holy Spirit. How? **He made his life count by surrendering his life to Christ and allowing Christ to live through him**. He was a funnel for that power.

That is what renewed faith in God and in Christ can do for us. **It can give us new power, new purpose for living our lives**—to the extent that we allow our lives for Christ to live in us and we in Him. Then, for all may see our good works and glorify God the Father in heaven.