

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 4:10-11

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

I was blessed to have inherited some of my father's woodworking ability that I enjoy sharing in the form of Christian "wood art." In both our cases, this was something that came about late in life. I say that because from the mid-1940s through the late 1960's everything was centered around living in the coalfields of southern West Virginia. As with most people, age has diminished some of the hardships that came with the territory. My mother lost her dad in a slate fall when she was 3-years old, and my father's dad was disabled in an accident when Dad was only 16 and the oldest of 10 kids. That's when he started working in the mines to help support his family. I was 6 when the effects of his injuries took his life.

When Dad returned from World War II, he married my mother and, over the years, raised four kids. We were blessed that Dad could return home every day without visible injury. He worked practically every day except for the two-week "miner's vacation" every summer. Being the close family person, he and mother were, we used that time to visit relatives. We even went out of state (Maryland) to see Mother's sister and her family. In addition, Mother made sure we went to church on Sunday mornings with Dad at work, providing me with a religious foundation.

My parents were devoted to each other, their children, other family members, and friends. I never heard either use a swear word or raise their voice, but they expected us to be responsible and respectful. I remember Grandmother calling Dad about one of his younger brothers who had quit school one time. I rode with Dad to where his brother was hanging out; Dad pulled up, lowered the window, and said, "boy, get in the car." He roomed with me that year, graduated, and went into the service.

The day I graduated from high school my dad loaded us all up and we left WV. He did not want us near a coal mine, I was 8 years older than my middle brother. Dad ended up being head of the Bureau of Mines in the state of Alabama. In 1996, black lung finally took Dad. Fortunately, we had Mother for several more years. I thank them for their gift of caring for other people, and I thank and bless them for sharing that gift with me. I'm grateful for the ability to create religious wood art to share with family, friends, and fellow believers. We each have a gift of some kind. Share your gift with others.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the beginning of a new day. You have given me this day to use as I will. I can waste it or use it for good. What I do today is very important because I am exchanging a day of my life for it. When tomorrow comes, this day will be gone forever, leaving something in its place I have traded for it. I want it to be a gain, not a loss; good, not evil; success, not failure, so I shall not regret the price I paid for it. Amen.

~Submitted by John Shoemaker for the Thirty-Ninth Reading of Lent