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## *Work Done by Half is Never Done Right!*

**A sermon by the Rev. Ricardo Bailey**  
**Proper 25 – Year A**

Back in 2010, I buried my grandmother. She was born in 1914 in Warrington, Georgia. Her name was Dona Mae Gilliom. However, to anyone who was a member of the family, she wasn't Dona Mae to us—she was that popular Southern matriarchal title known to so many of us native Southerners—and it was not Madea (even though Tyler Perry filmed one of his biggest movies here in our Court of Gratitude)—we called her Big Mama!

I am confused why we called her Big Mama, because she wasn't big at all! I know that the woman could cook and everything she cooked was better than the stuff you find on the Food Network. Maybe she was called Big Mama because she (as they say on the streets) "...paid the cost to be the boss." I don't know, but I knew that Big Mama was a force to be reckoned with.

My Grandmother was a very wise woman! She was full of the kind of knowledge that is lacking in this world. She was full of common sense! She never completed the sixth grade but she was the greatest diplomat I ever met. She was an accomplished economic scholar because of the Great Depression—she learned from her years as a young woman how to really survive and how to prepare for what had the potential of happening again if we were not vigilant and smart.

Perhaps the one thing I remember most about Big Mama was her strong work ethic. She knew Buckhead very well. She worked here in Buckhead as a maid for many years. She cleaned homes, took care of children and even accompanied members of the families that she worked for in their last days on this earth. It seems that the same work ethic she displayed she also passed on to all of us.

When my grandmother got up in age, she retired and began to be fully available to Saint Philip's A.M.E. Church right off of Candler Road and Memorial Drive in Decatur, Georgia. She was the foundress of the Missionary Society of the Church. I never saw them do any real work, but they did talk about a lot of people and they ate very well! Big Mama lived with us and because of that, she had a big influence on how things went on in the house. She would have us clean the house and outside the house. I had to rake leaves, pull up weeds, hang clothes and sheets to dry outside, scrub out toilets and bath tubs, put away groceries, sweep and mop floors, dust off furniture, clean fans, wipe down windows, fold clothes—I thought I was in an episode of *Roots*!

In the midst of my occasional pouting—because I would never protest doing what Big Mama asked me to do in her face, she would say these words to me, "Son, when you do your work, do it with all your might; because work done by half ain't never done right." I would say to myself in my head, "Whatever! Yeah, right!"

But, her words and the work ethic that she instilled in me and in all of my relatives was indeed the glue that enabled so many of us to survive in life. Half doing your work is never good. As a matter of fact, it's embarrassing and it really presents you in a bad fashion.

The Pharisees in our Gospel for this Sunday were folks who we can say over 2000 years later did not do their work right! If we were to ask a Pharisee back in the days of Jesus if they were right on target in the way that they lived and practiced their faith as Jews, then they would say, "Yes indeed!" However, Jesus knew the Pharisees very well. As a matter of fact, the region where Jesus lived and did most of his earthly ministry was a region heavily influenced by the Pharisees. The

disconnect between the Pharisees and Jesus was simple, yet complex! The Pharisees basically thought that keeping the Law and being faithful to God was basically the gist of what ensured pleasing God and maintaining a good relationship with God.

However, listen to these themes:

“strict observance of the Sabbath rest, purity rituals, tithing, and food restrictions based on the Hebrew Scriptures”  
—Felix Just, S.J. ([http://catholicresources.org/Bible/Jewish\\_Groups.htm#Pharisees](http://catholicresources.org/Bible/Jewish_Groups.htm#Pharisees))

These were the issues that Jesus had with the Pharisees—the Church folks—of His day. Observance of the Sabbath, purity rituals, tithing, and dietary observances that every Jew was to follow—all of these themes were themes that basically landed Jesus in trouble and in controversy with this very influential group of his time.

So, were their adherence to the Law and their relationship with God really all that bad? After all, being faithful to the rules ensure that we won't break the rules and that we are fundamentally faithful and good people; but, the issue comes in when you bring God into the equation as well as when you attempt to reinterpret what God really means and what it is that God really wants!

This is where the work is half-done! Jesus reminds us all throughout the Gospels that God is more pleased with the way that we see God in one another as opposed to using God as a means to separate “us” as followers of Jesus from “them” who may not do the following in the way that we would do it. This is where the work is only half-done right!

Jesus wants all of us to stop doing the following:

Stop making following him,  
loving him,  
knowing him and  
serving him so complicated!

To love and honor God and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves can be challenging at times, but it is not the Lord Jesus that makes the call to continual conversion hard, we are the ones the make it hard! As Church folks, we all are good on telling one another about the “sacred rules” and how we have a Heavenly V.I.P. backstage pass to the wisdom, favor, and power of God. However, our Christian identity is more than being based on rules, rather it means that we are really based on our continual conversion and action in the lives of others!

If I can see and recognize the sin and shortcomings in me, then I really don't have any time to point out and judge you for what I have personally judged as your sinfulness and shortcomings! The way I look at it is that Father Bailey is not perfect! Father Bailey does not have this Christianity-ideal all nicely packaged and put together in a nicely wrapped box for all of you to see! I would invite you to look in my box and you will see a nice façade, but on the inside ... Lord, have mercy! This brother can use some help!

That is why whenever I have the privilege and honor to break open God's Word for you in the Sunday sermon during our celebrations at the Cathedral, I do not approach this duty with a sense of over confidence. I approach it with a heavy sense of humility as well as vulnerability, because I know that people have been alienated by the Church; I know that people have been scandalized by the way that we act—ordained and lay people; I know that people have seen the hypocrisy that we say and do by making the relationship with God so heavy for others but design our personalized “get out of jail free card” for ourselves. To be a priest, to be a Christian, to be a visible sign to others of the compassion, and love of Jesus is not a call that I or any one of us in this Cathedral today should ever take lightly!

So maybe my Big Mama's memory is appropriate for today because through the power of God's Holy Spirit, all of us are being invited and reminded of the type of Christians that we should be. Our work is to present Jesus in his fullness to everyone we meet!

In other words, we must be perfected through our imperfections, we must be courageous through our self-doubt, we must be Incarnationally-relevant through our hypocrisy, and we must “put-on” Jesus over and above the temptation of what we want to say, want to think and want to do!

If we put Jesus as the source and the focus of our very existence and truly do what He commands, then the blueprint of life will become clearer and all the other stuff that has a tendency of blurring our vision can and will be made clean.

God put us in existence on this earth, at this time and in this place so that we can be his ears, his eyes, his hands, his feet, his mouth and his presence to everyone! By taking the time and having the courage to see Jesus in one another, we truly live out the commandment to “Love our neighbor as we love ourselves” to heart because that is when it becomes real.

My dear friends, we are close to the point in our worship this Sunday when we will unite this celebration and worship of God from this table of his Word to the table of the Eucharist—the optic focal point of our celebration today. Look around you right now and again at Holy Communion; you will see people who are your neighbor. Our Church teaches that all are welcome to the table! Look around you and recognize the miracle that is taking place: we all can taste and see the goodness of our God! We can bless His Holy Name because we are reminded today that there is:

“Plenty good room!

Plenty good room!

Plenty good room in my Father’s Kingdom!

Plenty good room!

Plenty good room!

Just take your seat & sit down!”

—LMGM II, ([https://www.giamusic.com/pdf/ContentsList\\_LMGM.pdf](https://www.giamusic.com/pdf/ContentsList_LMGM.pdf))

God in his generosity has made plenty of room for you and for me! Who are we that we cannot make room for one another?! This is the challenge and the call of being a Christian! Life is not always all about us! Life is always about how we have genuine Heavenly concern for the other! Whenever we do this we are not half-doing our work, but we are doing what we want done to ourselves—we care, we share, and we extend mercy in the same way that we want mercy shared with us! This is *doing work the right way!*

Big Mama had to instill this lesson in me and as her grandson in my fortieth year of life, I can say that I can feel her spirit when I in 2014, like she did in the 1960s, come to work in Buckhead! When I do my work as a teacher at The Westminster Schools or even the blessing to do ministry here at the Cathedral of St. Philip, I can feel her legacy and her presence in me, reminding me to glorify God in my words and in my work! See God in the ordinary times just as I do in the extraordinary moments, and most of all, recognize the holiness and the place of God in the folks I meet, teach and serve every day!

I’m thankful to God for to be a priest! I’m blessed that I was able to wake up this morning and be with you— all of you—to pray and worship our God!

If this work was good enough for Big Mama, then it can be good enough for me! Thank you Big Mama!

God has spoken, now let the Church say, AMEN!