

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

God entrusted Paul with the responsibility of bringing the gospel to diverse people. Hence the focus of Paul's ministry is not his own rights or privileges as an apostle but the privilege of serving God by freely sharing the good news of Christ with others.

¹⁶If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! ¹⁷For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. ¹⁸What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.

¹⁹For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. ²⁰To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. ²¹To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. ²²To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. ²³I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

Gospel: Mark 1:29-39

Everywhere Jesus goes, many people expect him to set them free from oppression. Everywhere he goes, he heals them and sets them free. Disease, devils, and death are running for their lives. The forces that diminish human life are rendered powerless by Jesus.

²⁹As soon as [Jesus and the disciples] left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

³²That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

³⁵In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." ³⁸He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." ³⁹And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

This is not a joke, this is the exact picture of the shampoo I am using. Upon closer inspection you will notice that it contains mosa mint oil, I have no idea what that means. It is detoxing my damaged hair with it I guess. In the orange it tells me it is PRO-V. I'm not sure what that is either but it is pro, and not con – so that has to be good. It says it is a daily revitalizing shampoo -every day; and in the small print at the bottom you can see that it revitalizes with four times the power in doing so. Much better than those 2x3 times power, and I can't wait to they come out with five or 6 times the power and then watch out. But alas, somehow, I continue to lose hair. Somehow, the promise to restore, to revitalize, is not working.

Now I was tempted to take a picture also of all the oils, ointments shampoos, conditioner, and things I don't even know what to call, that my wife Karen has, but I thought that probably wasn't a good idea for my own health. They're probably 87 cans, jars, tubes and bottles of stuff available. I'm pretty sure if we combined the right amounts of all of that stuff, we could somehow come up with another kid in our house!

In all seriousness we use these things, and many others like them to restore us, to reactivate us, and all honesty to feel vitalized sometimes to face a new day. It is the quest for wholeness, wholeness in our lives. How do you define wholeness? I have referred often to the fact that for a while I worked in a chemical dependency unit with not only addicted clients but also their families. In one of my clients and families' lectures, I talked about four aspects of living a healthy and whole life. We can look at life through all four aspects if you will: the mental, the emotional, the physical, and the social. In the center of all these we can see the letter "L." I did this on purpose so that I could talk about how in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for God, was "L" – El Shaddai. With this outlook, our spiritual lives

connect to our entire outlook all aspects of our lives. We have said many times that whatever we keep at our center, is our God; whether it's money or wealth, our reputation, our successes, or material goods; whatever we wrap our lives around, on whatever basis we make our decisions around - this is our God. And defined in this way, we understand that everyone then has a God of some type. So, what is at the center of your lives? What is the basis in which you make your decision, affect your outlook, and live your life? In the Christian life, we define our center as the saving act of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we seek to live out a healthy and whole spiritual life, as we seek to live faithfully in discipleship, we seek to balance all four of these: the mental, the emotional, the physical, and the social aspect of our lives and I think it hangs in the balance of our spiritual well-being.

How we define wholeness is an important part of our life outlook. Sometimes as a society, as a particular culture, we have defined wholeness in some unhealthy ways. We have said others are not whole because of reasons, we as humans have made up. For instance, we have said others are not whole if they choose to remain single all their lives or choose not to have children. In subtle and sometimes direct ways, we have indicated that others are not whole if they are not white, or of a certain race; others are not whole if they are female, or another type of gender identification. Sometimes people define wholeness as meaning everything is perfect, everything is right in that moment. In other words, nothing can be wrong or you are not whole, you are not complete. Sometimes, when we define wholeness in these ways, it then means we need to make sure we fight to acquire and get everything that is going to fill this void for us, or "cures" us of this or that. It means we have to treat others differently, even

manipulate them, or act in some ways in order to be right; I must conform to this or that or I am not worthy as person in others eyes or in God's eyes. It can also mean that we have to buy the best shampoo, we have to have that pair of shoes, we have to have that diamond ring, that expensive outfit, that fancy car, that big house, because otherwise we are not whole, we have not made it. And often times this leads us to feeling broken, we feel less than, and we feel isolated and disconnected.

But the reality of our lives, as understood in the Christian faith is that we are all broken, we are all broken in our relationship with one another, and broken in our relationship to God. There is nothing that we can do, no elixir or medicine we can ingest, nothing that we can acquire, that will ever make us truly and completely whole in the sense of perfectness. This is part why humanity needs God. We need Christ.

Today, in the short passage from the Gospel of Mark, we encounter in just a few verses, texts in which Jesus in differing ways, demonstrates aspects of wholeness to us. First, we heard how Jesus heals Simon Peter's mother-in-law who has a fever. She is healed so quickly that she is able to serve them food. We are told that he cures many others. We also heard about how Jesus casted out demons, who identified him as the Son of God, but he would not permit them to tell anyone. He got rid of the evil in their lives, for those who were possessed by it, and made these nameless ones whole again. We are also told that after this occurs Jesus gets away by himself for a time to be alone, this demonstrates yet another important aspect of being whole - time a rejuvenation, a time of being alone with God, a time of being a part and away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. We are also told that he prayed, yet another important facet to a healthy and whole faithful discipleship. Finally, we are told that Jesus

says, even though ministry is happening where he is that, that he must go out and venture to new places because that too is a part of his mission. It wasn't enough to simply be in one spot and take the wide, easy, and comfortable path. He would go into the unknown places, and sometimes we need to venture the same.

So how do we define wholeness? How do we see all the aspects of mental, emotional, social, and physical centered in our lives? How do we keep God at the base of all these? How do we practice discipleship, knowing that we are broken, but yet loved, claimed and forgiven children of God? How do we claim these things for our own daily living? The answer partly comes in our purpose statement here of "Praising God – Serving Others." We worship, we involved Scripture in our lives, we pray, we get away from it all when we can, we contemplate God's action in our lives. We serve others. We put our faith into practice. We seek to live in God's completed realm now – today.

Today as part of our service we offer yet another way. Today, we offer a time for healing. This is not a healing practice that promises us 100% result, or comes with any type of guarantee. Rather it is a tangible, hands on, practice of recognizing that we are broken and we invite God into this brokenness to soothe us, to heal us, to comfort us - often in ways that we often cannot imagine, as well as in those ways, in which we pray for, so that in our brokenness we may experience the presence of God.

So, at your own discretion, you may choose to come forward to receive a blessing and an anointing of oil; to invite God's wholeness into your life, to remind you of your center, to remind you that God is present in your joys and sorrows; to remind you that God cares deeply for each one of us, and hold out his promise of a wholeness, that we cannot even

imagine. Perhaps you do not want to come forward for this - this too is okay too. We can still use this time in prayer, or in silence, to invite God into things we are wrestling with the most. The things that detract from our center, the things that are dominating our mental, social, emotional, and physical well-being. In our praising God and serving others, may we continually ask God to enrich us on this journey and may we see in God a presence that, amidst our brokenness, amidst our humanity, claims us fully. Amen.