

Reflection on the Sunday's second reading from St. Paul 1Cor. 9:16-23 and St. Mark's Gospel 1: 29-39

- In our second reading this Sunday we hear St. Paul reflect on his life and on his call by God to spread the Gospel.
- And there is one sentence in this reading we should not pass over too quickly. In describing himself and his work Paul says, "I have become all things to all, to save at least some."
- What did he mean by this?
- To understand his statement we need to know a little bit about St. Paul. Paul was a devout Jew. He was well educated. He was a Roman citizen. He was a tent maker. He suffered from a life long undisclosed illness.
- After his conversion to Christianity, Paul embarked on many missionary journeys to spread the Gospel. In his travels he encountered all types of people: fisherman, farmers, merchants, sailors, political leaders. He taught among Greeks, Jews, Romans and pagans. All types of people living all types of lives.
- So what did he mean when he said: "I have become all things to all, to save at least some."
- Did he mean be a phony and pretend to be like the others? Did he compromise with the world just to fit in?
- Not at all. What Paul was saying is that he was willing to forego worldly comforts to reach as many people as he could. Paul was willing to get involved in the lives of the people he encountered. He was not quick to judge. He worked to understand people, their differences and their needs. All for the purpose of bringing God's love to them – that is how Paul spread

the Gospel. Yes he preached it but more importantly he lived it. He followed Jesus' example.

- And we see Jesus set that example in this week's Gospel. We see Jesus moving among people. He cures Peter's mother-in-law from an illness. We see the whole town was gathered at Jesus' door. "He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and he drove out many demons."
- Jesus moved among His people, understood their needs and brought compassion and love and healing to them. He set the example for all of his disciples (present and future) to imitate.
- Jesus is all things to all people.
- It is interesting to look at statues of Jesus in Churches throughout the world. In Asia, in Africa, in Europe and here at home. In different countries the images of Jesus look a little different – they look like the people native to that country. Why? Because they see Jesus as one of them. A God who loves them. Because that is exactly who He is!
- Jesus is all things to all people.
- Still today, Jesus comes to each of us. When we open our lives to Jesus in prayer and especially in the Holy Eucharist Jesus is willing to get involved in our lives. He understands each of us; our differences and our needs. He brings each of us hope, healing, comfort, love and reassurance.
- In the Holy Eucharist Jesus dwells in us. He takes on dark skin and light skin. He has brown eyes, blue eyes, oval shaped eyes, and almond shaped eyes – because He dwells in each of us – our bodies become His temple!!
- And because Jesus dwells in us, we like St. Paul, are called to be "all things to all people". We are called to understand each other and not judge. We are called to

get involved in each other's lives not ignore or pass by those in need.

- We are called to let others know God loves and cares about them. There is a world full of people thirsting to hear they are important, someone cares, that their life matters.
- So I will close this reflection with an excerpt from an article I read recently in which the author cited several ways we can “become all things to all people”. Here are his suggestions:
- 1. *Listen*. We are often too eager to share our own thoughts, especially when we know the other person needs to hear about Jesus. One common mistake is to jump into a conversation before we really hear what the other person is saying. We all appreciate being heard; when we extend that courtesy to someone else, he or she is more likely to listen to what we have to say. By listening first, the other person becomes an individual we care about rather than simply a mission field to convert.

2. *Be kind*. This should go without saying for Christians, but, unfortunately, we can forget kindness in the passion of the moment. This is especially true on the Internet. Online anonymity leads many people, even some professing to represent Christ, to make rude or hate-filled comments. Getting in the last word does not mean we won the argument or earned the person's respect. [James 1:19–20](#) admonishes us to “be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” Kindness and respect never go out of style and are appropriate regardless of the subject matter.

3. *Be sensitive to culture*. Trained missionaries know

that, before they can reach a cultural group, they must understand the particulars of that culture. The same is true for every believer, even if we never leave our own city. Western culture is rapidly changing, and in many places [Judeo-Christian principles](#) are no longer accepted or even understood. We don't have to approve of every part of a culture to understand it or reach those immersed in it. By first listening to discern where people are spiritually and then finding commonality with them, we may be able to reach those hungry for a truth they've never heard.

4. *Deal with prejudice.* Prejudice of every kind has been part of human history since the beginning. Despite how hard we try, we all carry some form of prejudice against certain other people groups. Admitting to God our own pride and repenting of judgmental attitudes and lack of love should be an ongoing process for Christians wanting to follow Paul's example of being all things to all people. As a former [Pharisee](#), Paul had to deal with his own prejudice against Gentiles in order to spread the gospel to the people Jesus had called him to.