

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Sep 9th 2013

The second century Christian martyr St. Ireneus coined a phrase that has resounded throughout the centuries, "The glory of God is the person fully alive."

Today's memorial of the Jesuit Peter Claver (1580-1654) stirs this realization in me.

For thirty-five years Peter lived humbly -- often condemned by respectable society -- serving slaves newly arrived in the port of Cartagena, Columbia. Upon their arrival Peter ministered immediately to the shackled and barely alive African slaves who managed to survive months in the stagnant and diseased holds of slave ships. Some 10,000 souls passed through the port annually. Peter estimated that throughout his time he ministered to some 300,000 persons.

We human beings become "fully alive" to the degree we live selflessly serving others for the love of God; Peter Claver was "fully alive."

God creates us in God's own image; we become "fully alive" to the degree that we actualize this image in us. God gives not only physical and intellectual gifts but also gives us the gift of God's own Spirit. Yes, God shares divine life with us by sending the Holy Spirit. Paul in his epistles does not hesitate to call Jesus' disciples "temples of God"!

Many of us actualize our physical and intellectual gifts by developing the human talents God has given us. But how many of us allow these natural gifts to be transformed by the Holy Spirit? The challenge of becoming "fully alive" for most of us in our contemporary secular culture is putting our gifts at the service of our neighbor -- living Jesus' two great commandments of love of God and love of neighbor.

Today's first reading -- written by Paul while actually confined in prison -- catches this crucial dimension of Christian holiness: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the affliction of Christ on behalf of his Body, which is the Church." Paul rejoices in his suffering because he experiences the joy of being identified with Jesus even more fully, precisely because of his suffering.

Paul was "fully alive."

May we be inspired by Paul — and by Peter Claver — to become ever more "fully alive."

Dick Hauser, S.J.