

Bishop's Reflection

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)

We learn a lot about Luke from the introduction to his Gospel: his reliance on previous accounts, both oral and written, the fact that he himself was not an eyewitness but relies on the testimony that was handed down to him, his own need to investigate and make sense of “the events that have been fulfilled among us”, and his desire and quest for truth, both for himself and for those to whom he writes. We learn that Luke is not so much a reporter, but a man of faith, who has delved deep into what he has come to know.

In many ways Luke is no different from anyone of us. None of us were present when Jesus made himself present to humanity in the flesh. We, too, rely on previous accounts, of both eyewitnesses and people like Luke who have investigated these matters thoroughly. And, like Luke, we are engaged in a desire and quest for truth, desiring to deepen what we have come to believe and to pass it on to our children.

In reading Luke's introduction there is an implicit expectation that we make efforts to do as Luke has done, not content to be passive observers or participants of our faith, but like Theophilus, to mull over Luke's account and to engage with the faith, and its many questions, with ongoing vigour and resolve.

During this liturgical year, dedicated to the Gospel of Luke, it is good for us to be aware of some of the central themes in Luke's Gospel. Here I would like to begin with the role of the Holy Spirit. Time and time again, Luke introduces the main actors in his Gospel as “being filled with the Holy Spirit”. The term is used in the opening of Luke's fourth chapter in today's Gospel when he speaks of Jesus as being “Filled with the power of the Spirit” and speaking of himself as, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.” Luke makes it clear that no one can truly act in God's Name unless moved by the Spirit. In response, we might ask ourselves, “How is that true in my life?”

Closely related to the role of the Holy Spirit in Luke's Gospel is the importance of prayer. We see this connection played out most clearly when, after Jesus had been baptized, and he was at prayer, the sky opened, the Spirit came upon him in physical form and the Father's voice was heard saying, “You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased”. Prayer plays a central role in the Gospel, reminding us that the Sonship we have in Him, as Sons and Daughters of God, is sustained and nourished in prayer.

Forgiveness and mercy are also highlighted in Luke's Gospel. Luke was a Physician by trade, a man of healing in every sense of the word. Luke explores the healing ministry of Christ within society, especially among those who had been alienated and left for dead. Parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son come to mind for many; but so, too, Jesus' opening teaching in today's passage, when Jesus identifies himself as the Anointed One who has come “to bring good news to the poor”, and “to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour” – a year of Jubilee.

As we read today's Gospel, and reflect on the power of God's Word, we may want to reflect on the effect of God's Word in our own lives. For it is not by mere evidence that Luke makes his case, but by the moving accounts that transform lives and calls forth change in our lives, too. If mercy is so powerful that it can forgive a dying man as he makes his final plea to Christ on the cross, how much more in the collective plea of the world, as we seek His mercy and strive to be instruments of His mercy, healing and forgiveness in our world today?