

Homily for Feast of St. Luke the Physician

We read in the Prophet Isaiah, which is the appointed Entrance Antiphon for today's Mass these words:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings of peace, bearing good news, announcing salvation. (Isaiah 52:7)

We should thank St Luke today for bringing good tidings to mankind because he was a faithful instrument in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Moved by the grace of divine inspiration he passed on to us a remarkable Gospel account as well as the history of primitive Christianity which we have in the Acts of the Apostles. As in all work done well, the inspired writing of Sacred Scripture required human effort. The help of God does not supplant human talent. Luke himself refers to the diligence involved in the task:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, ² just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, ³ it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.¹

Now here is what I want you to notice. St. Luke is going to all this trouble to write an account of the Life of Jesus, his Gospel, and his account of the early Church, the Acts of the Apostles, primarily for one man, Theophilus. He was probably a high Roman Official, as the title "excellent" implies.

Now let's think about what Luke did so this one man could know the truth

The task of composition meant assiduously interviewing firsthand observers, most probably Our Lady herself, the Apostles and the protagonists of the miracles who were still alive. Thanks to Luke's attentive correspondence with the grace of the Holy Spirit, today we can read an account of Jesus' infancy and the series of superb parables that he alone recounts. We recall the parable of the prodigal son, the one of the good Samaritan, the other about the negligent administrator, and of course the episode of poor Lazarus and the rich man. St Luke describes the divine mercy shown to those most in need of it as no other Evangelist does. He stresses Christ's love for sinners to show that Jesus came to save those who were lost. He also relates to us the Lord's forgiving of the woman taken in adultery, his stay in the home of Zacchaeus of ill repute, and the gaze of Jesus that works a transformation in Peter after his denials. He tells us about Christ's promise of salvation to the repentant thief, and of our Saviour's prayer for those who crucify and insult him on Calvary.

The role of women in society, seldom considered in the first century of Christianity, plays an important part in St Luke's Gospel. Jesus makes a concerted effort to restore to them their dignity, and this Evangelist alone describes several such figures, including the widow of Nain, the woman who bathed

Christ's feet as a sign of her fervent repentance, and the Galileans who put their goods at Jesus' disposal to follow and serve him. Then there are his friends, the two sisters from Bethany, Mary and Martha, the stooped woman whom he cured, and the group of weeping women from Jerusalem who show Christ compassion while he carries the Cross. We have a great deal for which to thank St Luke.

The man who was to become Pope John Paul I penned an imaginary letter of esteem to this particular gospel writer:

You are the only one who offers us a moving account of the birth and infancy of Christ which we can savour every Christmas. There is one verse that stands out above all the others: 'Wrapped in swaddling clothes, he was laid in a manger.' This single phrase has given rise to crib scenes throughout the world and to thousands of beautiful paintings.

Luke is also the source for the five scenes of the Joyful mysteries and the Hail Mary is based on words found in Luke's Gospel. The Angel says: "Hail Mary full of grace the Lord is with thee". And Elizabeth declares: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb".

Today we pause to consider the human perfection required and the effort involved in our own work. It may not stand out in a startling way so as to be admired by all, but all our tasks well-done for God are of lasting value. This is the precious gift we always have at hand to offer our Lord. Work carried out without interest or attention to detail is not worthy of the name, because it cannot be pleasing to God or of service to others. Let us pause to consider how we carry out the responsibilities that we should offer up every day for the glory of the Creator.²

Luke was a diligent workman in the service of the Gospel. May we be inspired to do our work with the same care as he did in composing his Gospel and Acts so that one man, Theophilus, could come to know with certainty that Jesus is Lord.