

10/17/2024

Luke...

If you were expecting something about Star Wars when you read the title of this article, I'm sorry to disappoint. This article is about that other "Luke," the saint who, by tradition, is identified as the author of the Gospel that bears his name. He is also the author of part two of that Gospel, called, the Acts of the Apostles. He writes these books around the year 85 AD, though they might be as early as 70 and as late as 95. We celebrate his feast day on October 18th, and it is well that we remember the good doctor. Luke is, by tradition, remembered as a physician and becomes the patron saint of doctors (among others).

Luke is likely a Gentile Christian and writes for a Gentile audience, throughout the Greco-Roman world. He addresses you, his reader, as "Theophilus" which is, "God-lover" or "Friend of God." This is a term used to describe those Gentiles who were drawn to the God of Israel, who found hope in the prophets, and looked for a coming Savior. His writing bears the hallmarks of a well-educated person, comfortable with a variety of styles. And he is an excellent storyteller.

He is also a traveling companion of St. Paul and joins him on his second and third missionary journeys, and even accompanies Paul to Rome (where the latter is martyred). Many things make Luke unique but certainly high among them is his compassion for human suffering and his belief in Jesus Christ as the universal Savior of humanity. These things stand out in Luke. He cares for the marginalized and excluded. He highlights the faithfulness of those that others reject. Some have, with good reason, therefore referred to Luke's Gospel as the "social justice" Gospel.

Luke, throughout his text, includes women and their significant (indeed, indispensable) role in God's plan of salvation for the world. He calls the wealthy and powerful to account, especially if they are neglectful of the needy. He lifts up the oppressed. He shows great care for the poor, and includes among them, the Holy Family, who can obtain no better lodging at the birth of Jesus than among the barn animals, where they lay him in a manger for his crib.

Where Matthew in his Gospel hears Jesus say, "Blessed are the poor *in spirit*." Luke hears Jesus saying simply, "blessed are *the poor*, for theirs is the Kingdom of God" (6:20). As with the other Gospel accounts, Luke also includes miraculous healings by Jesus, but he also includes parables that Jesus told, that address our response to human suffering and our

need to care for others.

It is only in Luke that we find the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25-37), for example. You know that story of the man robbed and beaten and left for dead on the side of the road. And how the Samaritan sees him and cares for him, attends to his wounds, bandages him up and nurses him back to health (just as Luke, as a physician, would surely have done). This after two people we might expect to help, a priest and a Levite, see the man there on the side of the road and do nothing. Rather they pass him by, moving to the other side of the road and continuing on their way. This is but one example, there are others.

We find in Luke's depiction of Jesus, a Christ so filled with mercy and forgiveness that he even prays for those who crucify him. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (23:34). And he offers salvation to a thief who repents on the cross next to him, promising that he would be that very day with our Lord in paradise (23:43). We also hear quite a lot in Luke/Acts about the Spirit, that is powerfully at work in Jesus and later in the Church, as she continues his work of love and ministry of compassion in the world.

There is obviously much more that could be said about Luke, much more than can be adequately said here. So, I'll just commend to you that you read his Gospel account, and then read part two of it, the Acts of the Apostles. A new liturgical year begins at the start of December, and we'll be spending a good bit of time with Luke over those twelve months. You'll be more prepared for what's coming.

Here, I'll end with the prayer for St. Luke's Day.

Almighty God, who inspired your servant Luke the physician to set forth in the Gospel the love and healing power of your Son: Graciously continue in your Church this love and power to heal, to the praise and glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

As always, I welcome your feedback: frpatrick@scbythesea.org

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Patrick