

SERMON FOR LAYREADERS

ST. LUKE'S DAY (October 18)

Brian McKee¹

First Lesson:²

Here beginneth the seventh Verse of the fifty-second Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson:⁴

Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.⁵

“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of

me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.... But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”⁶

Homily:

Why do we honor St. Luke this day? He is the author of the Gospel account that is, perhaps, the most beloved of the four on account of his wonderful ability to tell stories. St. Luke was a physician, and his writings focus on the healing power of Jesus Christ, in Christ’s lifetime, and in our lives today. The Acts of the Apostles, authored by St. Luke, is, on one level, an historical account of the early church. However, one yet another level, it is much more than just history.

St. Luke realized that the Resurrection and glorious Ascension of Jesus Christ, followed by the gift of the Holy Ghost on Pentecost, had ushered in a new age of history. These miraculous events had ushered in the Church Age, the

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² *Psalms and Lessons for the Fixed Holy Days* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xliv (PECUSA 1928/1943).

³ Isaiah 52:7-10 (KJV).

⁴ *Psalms and Lessons for the Fixed Holy Days* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xliv (PECUSA 1928/1943).

⁵ Acts 1:1-8 (KJV).

⁶ Acts 1:5 & 8 (KJV).

lem. St. Luke meant for us to pray at regular times each day, so that our prayers literally become a ritual act of our daily lives. These regular, organized daily prayers developed into a liturgy of the early monasteries and abbeys, known as the “Daily Office.” The services of Daily Morning Prayer, in which we are now participating, and the services of Daily Evensong, are the Daily Office taken from the earliest monastic communities of the British Isles. They were translated into English, by Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer, to form the core of his BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER.

St. Luke is responsible for writing large portions of the Offices, or services, of Daily Morning Prayer and Daily Evensong. The Benedictus, from Luke 1:68-79, is sung in Morning Prayer. The Magnificat, from Luke 1:46-55, is sung in Evensong. The Nunc Dimitis, from Luke 2:29-32, is sung in Evensong. The Gloria In Excelsis, sung in Evensong, and the Holy Communion, begins with the words written by St. Luke, beginning at Luke 2:14. St. Luke has given us these building blocks of the liturgical, or communal, prayer of the Church throughout history, and into the future.

St. Luke has literally given us the path, a spirituality, that leads to eternal life. Today, we remember, with gratitude, the life and work of St. Luke.

Let us pray:

O Shepherd of us all, who inspired Thy servant, St. Luke the Physician, to set forth in the Gospel, the love and healing power of Thine only Son, Jesus Christ: Grant, we ask Thee to send Thy Spirit to this community of gathered believers, that we may faithfully devote ourselves to the example of Christ’s Apostles in our daily living, that we may faithfully receive thy Sacraments, and that He may bring Thy healing grace to Thy Holy Catholic Church, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

birth of a living body of Christ. St. Luke not only recorded these events. St. Luke literally wrote the “blue print” for the how the Church was to operate. Even more than that, he wrote a spiritual road map we can follow to eternal life.

Acts, Chapter one, Verses 5 & 8, give us the starting place for our spiritual path: “For John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.... But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

The beginning point, or our initiation into the Body of Christ -- the Church -- begins with baptism. As Verse 5 of our Second Lesson teaches us, this new Sacrament, called Baptism, was no longer just the ceremonial washing of water administered by St. John the Baptist. The Sacrament of Baptism was a gift of grace of the Holy Trinity, through the Holy Ghost, that grafts us into the Body of Christ. It is not just a ceremonial washing with water, it is literal “rebirth” of each of us as a child of God. It is free grace, given to us, that cleanses from all the sins of our past, and turns us around on a new path toward God. This initiation into the faith, as St. Luke made clear, was not just for the Jewish people. It was for all. This newly-born Body of Christ -- the Church -- was, unlike the Old Testament nation of Israel, to include the Gentiles.

In Acts, Chapter 2, Verse 42, St. Luke lays out the rest of the spiritual path that leads to God: “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

St. Luke tells us that we are to devote ourselves to the doctrine and teaching of the Apostles. The center of the Apostles’ preaching was the “good news”, in Old English called the “God spel” or “Gospel”, of Jesus Christ. However

the Apostles' teaching was not just a general telling of the stories of Jesus's life and ministry. The teaching of the Apostles focused on the "Paschal Mystery." The Paschal Mystery encompasses the Incarnation, or miraculous conception and Virgin Birth, of Christ; Christ's life and teaching; Christ's sacrificial death upon the Cross; Christ's miraculous Resurrection from the dead; Christ's glorious Ascension into Heaven; and, finally the gift of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost.

Thus, we are not just concerned with the teachings of the past, nor escaping into a hope for the future. What we are truly concerned with as Christians, living into the Paschal Mystery, is with the way we live into the future, through remembering a past, which transforms the present. Other Gospel accounts include the stories of Christ's life, death and resurrection. However, only St. Luke, who personally knew and interviewed St. Mary, and according to some traditions "wrote" icons of her, tells us the story of Christ's conception by the Holy Ghost and His birth in a stable in Bethlehem.

St. Luke is the only Biblical author who tells us that the apostolic hope is centered in the Paschal Mystery. There is an evangelical component to combining the sacramental spirituality taught by St. Luke with the Paschal Mystery. St. Luke makes it clear that we are to share this Paschal Mystery "unto the uttermost parts of the earth."

St. Luke tells us that we are to devote ourselves to the Apostles' fellowship. The Greek word that was translated in the King James Bible as "fellowship", is "koinonia". *Koinonia* has a much deeper meaning than just casual fellowship or friendship. *Koinonia* literally encompasses a sense of community, a sense of Christian love and concern for one another, and a sense of mutual support. Not all Christian communities share the same "apostolate" -- the work they are sent out to do. Fundamental to *koinonia* is for each of us to discover his or her "charism", meaning the gift that each of

us has been given by the Holy Ghost for service, and to discern the apostolate, or work, to which each of us is called.

St. Luke tells us that we are to devote ourselves to the "breaking of bread." Primarily, and most importantly, this means the frequent reception of the Holy Mystery known as the Eucharist, the Holy Communion, or the Lord's Supper. Through this Sacrament of the Eucharist, we are literally fed the spiritual food that sustains us, and gives us strength, to follow the path to eternal life. We feast, not just on unleavened bread and wine; but Jesus Christ, working through the Holy Ghost, transforms unleavened bread and wine into the Precious Body of Christ and the Precious Blood of Christ. How this happens, we humans cannot comprehend: it is a Holy Mystery. We receive this mystery, through faith, believing the words of Christ Himself, when He said, "This is my Body..." and "This is my Blood..."

A separate ritual act of the early Church, revived by the Anglican priests, The Reverend Messers John and Charles Wesley, after witnessing it among the Moravians, was the "love feast." The "love feast" is not the Sacrament of the Eucharist; its bread is not presumed to be changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. The common, everyday loaf of bread is simply broken, and shared with one another as a token of the *koinonia* that binds a Christian community together. The "love feast" became an important part of the dispersed religious order in the Anglican Church founded by the Wesleys, known as the "Methodist Society", so-called because of its daily "method" of living. This "method" of living a Christian life -- which we might call a "rule of life" -- came directly from the pattern set out for us by St. Luke. Thus the original "Methodist Society" could have easily been called the "Lukan Society."

Finally, St. Luke teaches us to devote ourselves to the "prayers". St. Luke does not just mean an occasional prayer when we are in trouble, or, when we have a crisis, or prob-