

Liturgical Year “C”

**Following Jesus
with
The Gospel of Luke**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Liturgical year begins with the First Sunday of Advent and ends with the Solemnity of Christ the King. There are three year Sunday Cycle (A, B, C) following every time a different synoptic Gospel: on year A - the Gospel of Matthew, B - the Gospel of Mark, and C - the Gospel of Luke. The other Gospel, somehow different, of John, is used during special Sundays throughout the Liturgical year: Christmas, Lent and Easter season as well as on certain Sundays of Ordinary Time during year B - the shortest of the synoptic Gospels. Here the readings from John, chapter 6, explains the miracle of the loaves. Each of the evangelists portrays Jesus its own way, as if from a different angle, and seem to address a different set of people.

The Gospel of Luke is read almost in its entirety on consecutive Sundays every three years. Though the gospel stories appear to be no different from the same ones read last year from Mark or the year before from Matthew there are some very original stories like that of Good Samaritan or Prodigal Son that are not found in the other Gospels. Also the way the same stories are written also have small differences. For this reason it is worthwhile to study Luke's gospel in order to be able to recognize those nuances and context of the passages that are selected during the Sundays of year C.

We do not read the Gospel of Luke the way the Jews read the Torah throughout their year, but the texts are selected according to the needs of the season Advent; which prepares us for the Second coming as well as the first coming of Christ, the Christmas season that celebrates the events of Christ birth, and Lent where only stories calling for conversion and prayer are used. The most sequential readings from Luke we have during the Ordinary Time between

Christmas and Lent; and between the Pentecost and the Feast of Christ the King. However, even here not all of the stories are used so our reading and study of the whole Gospel of Luke

during the year C is so important in order to understand the whole context and to see Jesus with Luke's eyes.

2. THE ORIGIN OF THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

The origin of the Gospel, mainly its author, time and place of writing, its original addressees have much bearing on the text itself and give invaluable background for the reading of the Gospel.

The Gospel of Luke is the last one that was written from the synoptic Gospels around AD 80. It is important to note that it was written after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the dispersal of Jews from the Holy Land that followed. At that time the witnesses who saw and heard Jesus were either very old or dead already. Since there was a strong need for writing the stories of those witnesses down for the new generation of younger Christians. One could ask: Why there was needed another gospel then, since Mark and Matthew were already written? Were they not sufficient? Well, Luke explains the writing of this Gospel in Lk 1:1-4, but actually his story is in two volumes (see Acts 1:1-2). The Gospel is his own "orderly account" of Jesus' life and ministry, even though he is not one of the original twelve disciples and most probably never saw Jesus.

Luke, though not mentioned neither in Gospel or the Acts of the Apostles is considered the author of both books. We do not know much about him apart from the mention of him in Colossians 4:14 as "beloved physician" (cf. Phm 23) He definitely was the only gentile Evangelist with little knowledge of the Hebrew language or even perhaps of Jerusalem and Israel itself. It is claimed that he was born and lived in Antioch, the missionary base for Paul and his companions, Luke evidently being one of them.

The addressees of the Luke's Gospel were gentile Christians living in the western coast of Asia Minor and east coast Greece - places where he traveled together with Paul on his missionary journeys.

From some of the Pauline writings and from Acts we know that Luke and Mark were together on missionary journeys (cf. Phm 23) thus definitely Luke writing his Gospel knew Mark's Gospel and perhaps even Matthew's. However, there were stories that Mark did not include in his work and which were important; Prodigal Son (stress on conversion of sinners), Good Samaritan (importance of

non-Jews), Mary, mother of Jesus and the women (role of women in the church), Widow's mite, Story of beggar Lazarus (the poor and marginalized), etc. These issues seemed to be very important for the Christians living in that region of Greece and Asia Minor to whom Luke wrote the Gospel.

3. THE UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS

Gospel of the Poor

Luke voices a preferential option for minorities, segregated groups, and the underprivileged. Samaritans, lepers, publicans, soldiers, public sinners in disgrace, unlettered shepherds, the poor—all these receive special encouragement in his Gospel. All people are important for God and are worthy of Jesus' salvation.

Gospel of Universal Salvation

As a companion of Paul it is from him that Luke got the idea of the universality of salvation. In comparison to Matthew which only asserts Jesus' Jewish origin from Abraham, the Genealogy of Luke goes all the way back to Adam to present Jesus as belonging to all humanity not just to one nation.

Luke the physician writes with an observant eye to mannerisms, psychological reactions, hidden motivations. He alone gives the psychological setting in 3:15; 4:14f. 9:43; 11:1, 29; 13:1; 17:20; 18:1, 9; 19:11. His pagan origin as well as his extensive traveling is probably responsible for his broad-minded openness to all groups of peoples.

Gospel for Women.

Although Luke, like Paul, never married for the sake of the Kingdom of God and the apostolate (14:26; 18:29), he recognizes a more important role for women than does any of the other evangelists. The reason for this can be traced to his Hellenistic background, where society permitted women to occupy a more prominent, public place than was true within Judaism (Acts 8:27; 16:13-15; 18:26; 24:24).

Gospel about Mary, Mother of Jesus.

Also Mary, the mother of Jesus receives much more prominent role in the Gospel of Luke than in the three other Gospels. In fact only Luke

gives a scriptural basis for all the five joyful mysteries of the Rosary: Annunciation by Angel Gabriel (1:26-38), Visitation of Elizabeth by Mary (1:29-56), detailed description of the events surrounding the Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem (2:1-21), The presentation of Jesus in the Temple (2:22-40) and the finding of Jesus in the Temple (2:41-52). All the three important evangelical hymns used daily in the Prayers of the Church: in the morning *Benedictus* (1:68-79), evening hymn *Magnificat* (1:46-55) and night prayer *Nunc Dimitimus* (- now dismiss,) (2:28-32) come from the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke.

Gospel of the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel of Luke could be named the Gospel of the Holy Spirit. Almost everything happens through the holy Spirit and prayer: Mary conceives by the power

of the holy Spirit, she is filled with the spirit when she recites the magnificat, John the Baptist predicts the baptism in the Holy Spirit, Jesus is filled with the spirit after his baptism and led by the spirit. Jesus announces in Nazareth; “the spirit of the Lord is upon me..” etc.

Gospel of Mercy

The stories of the Lost sheep, prodigal son, conversion of Zacheus, or even Good Samaritan stress a great role of God’s mercy in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus spreads pardon to all even to his own executioners and to the repentant thief on the cross.

Literary Style

In a desire for order, Luke ordinarily avoids unnecessary repetitions of similar events: only one anointing of Jesus (7:36-50); one multiplication of loaves and fishes (9:12-17); one account of the barren fig tree (13:6-9); one return of Jesus to the apostles in the garden (22:39-46); one trial scene before Jewish authorities (22:66-71). However, where there are repetitions it is to stress something very important: e.g. the repetition of the sending of the disciples first 12 then 72 may indicate that in the time Luke wrote the Gospel many more disciples and apostles were appointed. Jesus did not want to reduce the mission to the twelve but open to the many as the need arises.

Jerusalem

Jerusalem is the focal point of Luke’s writings both of Luke and Acts. The major part of the Gospel is the journey of Jesus towards Jerusalem. In Jerusalem happen the most important events of Jesus death and Resurrection and the Sending of the Holy Spirit. In Acts the Gospel about the salvation if Jesus Christ goes out of Jerusalem to the ends of the world.

Greek names and words only.

Luke writes primarily for Gentiles, and for their sake he makes many changes in the Gospel tradition. He will either omit Semitic words or find a substitute for them. He never uses the following Semitic words that occur in other Gospels: abba (Father) in Mk 14:36 (cf. Lk 22:42); Boanerges (sons of thunder) in Mk 3:17 (cf. Lk 9:54); ephphatha (be opened) in Mk 7:34; hōsanna (save, we pray) in Mk 11:9; Jn 12:13; Mt 21:9 (cf. Lk 19:38). Instead of the

title rabbi, Luke prefers didaskale (teacher), and especially epistata (master). He will give the meaning of the word instead of its Aram form; he uses kranion (word for “skull”) instead of golgotha.

4. THE STRUCTURE OF THE GOSPEL.

The basic outline of the Gospel of Luke is taken from Jerome Biblical Commentary. The added is the text in italics which indicates the references to the Sunday Missal’s uses of the various parts of the Gospel. Most of the Sundays of Ordinary Time concentrate on the Ministry of Jesus in Galilee and the Journey of Jesus to Jerusalem. While the other Sundays during Special Seasons: Advent, Lent, Christmas, etc. select other readings from the beginning and the end of the Gospel.

- I Prologue (1:1-4)**
(See: 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time)

- II The Infancy Narrative (1:5-2:52)**
 - A Diptych of the Annunciation (1:5-56)
 - a) The Annunciation of the Birth of John the Baptist (1:5-25)
 - b) The Annunciation of the Birth of Jesus (1:26-38)
(See: March 25 - Annunciation)
 - c) The Visitation (1:39-56)
(4th Sunday of Advent)
 - B The Diptych of the Births (1:57-2:52)
 - a) The Birth of John the Baptist (1:57-80)
 - b) The Birth of Jesus (2:1-40)
(See: Christmas Midnight Mass)
 - c) The Boy Jesus in the Temple (2:41-52)
(See: Presentation of the Lord -Feb. 2nd)

- III Preparation for the Public Ministry (3:1-4:13)**
 - A John the Baptist (3:1-20)
(See: 2nd & 3rd Sunday of Advent;)
 - B The Baptism of Jesus (3:21-22)

(See: *Baptism of the Lord Sunday*)

C The Genealogy of Jesus (3:23-38)

D The Temptation (4:1-13)

(See: *1st Sunday of Lent;*)

IV **The Galilean Ministry** (4:14-9:50)

A Two Typical Events: At Nazareth and Capernaum
(4:14-44)

(See: *3rd & 4th Sundays of Ordinary Time*)

B From the Call of Peter to the Naming of the Twelve
(5:1-6:16)

(See: *5th Sunday of Ordinary Time*)

C The Full Ministry (6:17-9:9)

(See: *6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th and 11th Sundays of Ordinary Time*)

D The Climax (9:10-50) Miracle of the loaves, Peter's
profession of faith, Transfiguration, ...

(See: *12th Sunday of Ordinary Time & also 2nd Sunday
of Lent; Corpus Christi;*)

V **The Journey Narrative** (9:51-19:28)

A Section Proper to Luke (9:51-18:14) comparable with
Matthew: Includes also unique Lukan stories like: Good
Samaritan story, Martha & Mary encounter with Jesus,
Lost Sheep & coin and Prodigal Son stories, beggar
Lazarus, Ten Lepers, Widow and the harsh judge,
Pharisee and Tax Collector at prayer, Zacheus.

(See: *13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st, 22nd,
23rd, 24th, 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th & 30th Sundays of
Ordinary Time and also 3rd & 4th Sundays of Lent,*)

B Section Common with Mark's Gospel (18:15-19:28)

(See: *31st Sunday of Ordinary Time*)

VI **The Jerusalem Ministry** (19:29-21:38)

A Events at Jesus' Entry (19:29-48)

(See: *Palm Sunday - Blessing of Palms,*)

B Controversies in Jerusalem (20:1-21:4)

(See: *32nd Sunday of Ordinary Time*)

C Discourse on the Fall of Jerusalem (21:5-38)

(See: 33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time & 1st Sunday of Advent)

VII The Passion and Glorification of Jesus (22:1-24:53)

- A The Paschal Meal (22:1-38)
(See: Passion Sunday)
- B The Passion, Death, and Burial (22:39-23:56)
(See: Passion Sunday; Christ the King Sun.)
- C The Resurrection and Ascension (24:1-53) Further subdivisions of the Gospel will be found in the Commentary itself.
(See: Ester Vigil)

5. THE READING & PRAYING WITH LUKE

During the Liturgical year “C” it is good to return over and over to the Gospel of Luke in our Bibles. It is not enough just to read the passage assigned for Sunday in our Sunday Missals. One would hope that we familiarize ourselves very well with the entire Gospel reading it in its entirety during the season of Advent and again in Lent and may be even a third time during the Easter season or during Ordinary time.

Every morning, evening and night when we pray the Breviary we pray with Luke. However, the best way to pray with Luke is to use Lectio Divina - Prayerful meditation on the Sundays Gospels. It is perhaps not enough to just listen to the Sunday Homily, our preparation for the mass may go further, either before Sunday or on the Sunday itself we take time to meditate on the passage which was read or will be read on Sunday.

Remembering all the characteristics of the Luke’s Gospel as well the origins surrounding the writing of this Gospel will help us in the process of meditation. We become more aware of the various nuances in the text and we use the great themes of Luke: like the Holy Spirit, universal Salvation, option for the poor

and marginalized, Jerusalem as a focal point, etc. to enhance our meditation. In Advent and Christmas we may use the two first chapters of the Gospel to enhance our spiritual appreciation for the season. In turn, during Lent we may use chapter 15 and 18:1-19:10 to remind ourselves about the need for conversion and the various aspects of it.

Once we start to use this Gospel for reading and prayer we discover that we become very familiar with that Gospel and will be able to find various important texts as we need them for various occasions.

6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GOSPEL OF LUKE IN THE CARIBBEAN

The way that Luke reaches out to gentiles, people of various nations and races makes it a very useful text in diverse Caribbean situations. The salvation is not just for one race or people but for all. It challenges the insular thinking of many Christian Churches in the Caribbean isles.

In many social situations in the Caribbean sin and sinfulness remains

like a stigma upon persons; a pregnant teenage girl is practically ostracized from the churches, similarly a homosexual person is virtually worthy of any punishment. Any killer is, perhaps, not always in court but in public opinion, condemned to capital punishment. Such stereotypes are challenged by Jesus portrayed in the Gospel of Luke. Here, Jesus offers pardon and mercy but also a challenge to a better and more moral life. Jesus challenges the hypocrisy of those who think better of themselves (the publican and Pharisee praying in the Temple) and cannot forgive (the other son in the Prodigal Son's story). Luke also tells us that no matter what you do and wherever you are even against all hope there is a forgiveness for you if you believe and repent: (Jesus forgives those who crucify him and the repentant sinner who is crucified with him).

Since the beginning of Christianity in the Caribbean the Churches and even within the Churches people were divided according to class, race and what they owned or not owned; of where they were placed in the Church and what they could do in the Church. Though the times have changed such attitudes might not have died completely. Luke's portrayal of Jesus, who makes a fundamental option for the poor and marginalized, poses a very good challenge to the old way of thinking. It calls us to make the same option not only in the orientation of our service to the poor (avoid paternalism!) but of our whole life's attitude and our willingness to associate as equals with the low in status and class.

The charismatic, spontaneous spirit is prevalent in all the Churches in the Caribbean and the Holy Spirit is important not only in the Pentecostal Churches. Luke's Gospel of the Spirit is very much in tune with the enthrallment with the Spirit in our religious-church life.

Finally, our Churches in the Caribbean are filled with women who often assume the prominent roles in ministry and

governance of the church. Luke provides a great inspiration for this phenomenon being the gospel for the women.