

## THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

*Gospel: Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21*

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

### REFLECTION 1:

### THE THIRD GOSPEL

From Advent of 2018, to the end of Ordinary Time in the year 2019, we will be considering Year C of the three-year cycle of Sunday scripture readings. Year C is known as the Year of Luke. So, at the outset, a few words about this unique Gospel as we begin Ordinary Time. The Gospel of St. Luke has been called the loveliest book in the world. There is a legend that Luke was a skilled painter and there is even a painting of Mary in a Spanish cathedral to this day that is said to be by him. Certainly Luke had an eye for vivid things. It would not be far wrong to say that the third Gospel is the best life of Christ ever written. In fact, during the Christening of children in our parish, we priests present the parents with a beautiful copy of the Gospel of Luke so as to encourage the next generation to learn of the life of Christ.

Luke was a Gentile and he has the unique distinction of being the only New Testament writer who was not a Jew. He was a medical man; a doctor by profession. Paul in a letter (Col. 4:14) sends 'greetings from my dear friend Luke, the doctor' who accompanied him on his missionary journey. Maybe that very fact of being a doctor gave him the wide sympathy he expressed in his writings. Besides his Gospel, Luke also wrote the Acts of the Apostles following the disciples after the resurrection, proclaiming the word of God among Jews and Gentiles. Luke's Gospel was written for a man known as Theophilus, a high official in the Roman government, giving him a picture that must have bound his heart closer to Jesus of whom he had heard.

Very often on stained-glass windows, the writers of the Gospels are pictured and to each is attached a symbol. The symbol for Luke is the calf. The calf is the animal of sacrifice; and Luke saw in Jesus the sacrifice of the entire world. Luke's Gospel is a very careful work. His Greek is excellent. The first four verses in our gospel for today are the best Greek in the New Testament. In them he claims that his work is the product of a most careful research. As the faithful companion of Paul, he must have known all the great figures of the Church and he made sure that he had them tell their stories to him. In the gospel account of the birth of Jesus we heard over Christmastime, Luke gives no fewer than six contemporary datings. Here is a man who is writing with care and will be as accurate as it is possible to be. It is also possible that Luke had access to Mary, Jesus' Mother, as well as meeting up with St. John who was bishop of Ephesus and lived to a good old age.

Luke's gospel is especially the gospel of prayer and on all great moments in his life, he shows Jesus at prayer. His gospel is also the gospel of women. In Palestine the place of women was low. The Jewish Morning Prayer gave thanks to God that he was not a Gentile, a slave or a woman! But Luke gives a very special place for women. The birth narrative is told from Mary's point of view. In Luke we read about Elizabeth, Anna, the widow of Nain, Martha, Mary and Mary Magdalene.

Luke's Gospel has frequent reference to the action of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus. The spirit leads Jesus into the desert; he alights on Jesus like a dove at his baptism. In Luke the phrase 'praising God' occurs in the three great hymns that the church has sung throughout the centuries: The Magnificat (1: 46-55), the Benedictus (1: 68-79) and the Nunc Dimittis (2: 29-32).

Finally, Luke's gospel is the universal gospel – all barriers are down, his gospel refuses to shut the door on anyone. He speaks of approval of Gentiles, a Roman centurion, people from east and west. Luke is interested in the poor, in bringing the good news, so that 'all flesh should see the salvation of God'. Luke places no limits to the love of God. F.W. Faber wrote the lines:

There's wideness in God's mercy,  
With the wideness of the sea:  
There's a kindness in his justice  
Which is more than liberty,  
For the love is broader than  
The measure of man's mind  
And the heart of the eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.  
Luke's Gospel is the demonstration that this is true.

## **REFLECTION 2: JESUS THE TRUTH**

Irish presidents give an inaugural speech after being sworn into office. The speech usually provides an insight into what to expect from them. Today's Gospel is like such a speech. Jesus has been chosen by the Father for the office of Messiah and he begins by telling us what to expect of him during his messianic ministry.

One of Jesus' very early visits was to Nazareth his own home town. Nazareth nestled in a hollow scooped out near the plane of Jezerell. Jesus had only to climb to the hilltop above the town and he could view an amazing panorama for miles around - blue in the distance was the Mediterranean and the Way of the Sea from Egypt to Damascus, laden with caravans, skirted the way. Even though Nathaniel in reference to Jesus' home town quipped cynically, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?', it would be wrong to think of it as a backwater.

A verse in today's Gospel (Luke 1: 1-4, 14-21) says that Jesus sat down giving the impression that he had finished. In point of fact it means that Jesus was about to start - Rabbis taught sitting down. Even today we refer to a professor's 'chair'. Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah, so setting the tone for the Jubilee Year and with it a new relationship of righteousness and integrity between God and his people - a time for the renewal of creation is at hand. There has to be a rebalancing of wealth and resources between the rich and the poor and the re-establishment of a just society. It becomes patently clear that

the Heavenly Father is not pleased with any situation where his gifts to all are so tied up with one group in his creation, why leaving others downtrodden, like El Salvador, where 95% of the wealth of the country lines the pockets of 5% of the population. Whether we see this as the uncomfortable truth or not is now a matter of faith. True enough down the centuries there have been Christians who have worked for the poor such as the Simon Community and many others who have sought the just distribution of wealth. Others on the other hand have rejected this and have seen it as Christianity nosing its way into politics. It all resolves over the conviction as to whether a baptised Christian believes that Jesus is the Son of God or not.

If Jesus is to enter into our community, we should be concerned about the poverty that touches us, a hatred of injustice and a raw emptiness within for those who are hungry in our world. God's mercy knows no limits and his inspiring words embody the good news for all the nations. As the Psalmist noted many centuries before 'For the Lord stands at the right hand of the needy ones to save their lives from those who condemn them' (Psalm 109: 31).