

St. Luke, Evangelist (10/18/09 – *The Harvest Lord Still Sends Out His Peace & Healing*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

The *Feast of St. Luke, Evangelist* that the Church celebrates today, the 18th of October, is all about the Gospel – not about St. Luke in and of himself. That is important – for it is too easy to make things about **people** ... about **us**. That is the nature and *modus operandi* of our sinful flesh – to be curved in on ourselves and to place ourselves (and other people like us) at the center of attention. But that's not what the *Feast of St. Luke, Evangelist* – or the commemoration of Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, or any other saint – is about. It is always and only about Christ ... and what He has done and continues to do in the lives of His saints.

Now it is appropriate on such a day as this to remember what God has done in and through particular believers – encouraging, even. As those who have been in the Wednesday Bible Study on the book of HEBREWS could tell you, the rehearsing of God's great deeds in the lives of His people serves to encourage **us** in our own faith and lives. For as we see what our faithful God has done in the past – keeping His saints in the faith despite great adversity ... even in spite of their own weak faith – we know and learn that God will also faithfully act in **our** own lives for **our** good and the good of those around us ... since *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever* [HEB 13.8]. As HEBREWS 12.1 tells us: *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.* So let us recall a bit how God has worked in and through St. Luke ... also for our blessing today.

We don't hear much about St. Luke in Holy Scripture – in fact, his name only shows up three times. He isn't one of the Apostles – though some think he was perhaps numbered among the 72 in our *Holy Gospel Lesson* for the day. We know that Luke was a physician – Paul calls him *the beloved physician* in COLOSSIANS [4.14]. And we can also see his detail-oriented physician's eye and interest in many parts of the Gospel the Holy Spirit inspired him to pen. It is Luke who gives detail about our Savior's Birth. Tradition says that Luke was also a painter. The Eastern Church refers to Luke as *The First Iconographer*. (The icon is a style of Christian painting that depicts people and events of Holy Scripture in such a way as to

intentionally direct our minds and souls to heavenly, eternal realities ... often painting multiple events into one scene so that we rightly understand the meaning.) And whether or not it is true that Luke was a painter as we normally think of painters, what is most certainly true is that the Holy Spirit used St. Luke as His blessed instrument to paint a vivid picture of the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and **continued** ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ in the **words** of his Gospel and Acts of the Apostles.

It is through St. Luke that the Holy Spirit reveals to us the details of our Savior's birth – the events leading up to ... and what happened when Jesus was born. It is the Birth of our Lord according to St. Luke that we know and want to hear each Christmas – Gabriel's visit to Mary ... the Census of Caesar Augustus ... the late-term trip to Bethlehem ... the Birth itself ... and the manger where the Christ-Child was laid *because there was no place for them in the inn* ... the *Gloria in Excelsis* sung by angels to shepherds in the fields ... and then later Jesus' presentation at the temple where we receive the words of the *Nunc Dimittis* we also sing today: *Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word, for mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation* (spoken by elderly Simeon upon seeing the Infant Savior, Christ the Lord, the Word made flesh).

It is through Luke that the Holy Spirit gives us the account of how our Lord raised the son of the widow of Nain – a prelude to our own resurrection from the dead on the Last Day. It is through Luke the physician that the Holy Spirit teaches us about Christ our own Good Samaritan Who is compassionate, Who isn't afraid to touch us sinners – even to become one with us ... Himself left for dead by the priests and Levites on His Cross, and Who heals the wounds of our iniquities by receiving all our infirmities into His Own flesh. It is through Luke that we learn about the Father's love for us, His wayward and prodigal sons (and daughters) – how He longingly waits for us with open arms to embrace us and restore us to full sonship in His kingdom whenever and as often as we return to Him in repentance and faith. It is through the beloved physician that we learn about our Christ healing the ten lepers – just as the Good Physician heals our souls from the leprosy of our sin. It is by Luke's hand that we have recorded the parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector – in which the Holy Spirit assures us that God is merciful to poor, miserable sinners like us ... sending us home from

this place justified in His sight for the sake of Christ.

It is also through Luke that God would give us the understanding that Christ our dear Lord has not ceased His earthly ministry – despite His Ascension. No, quite the contrary, our Savior has multiplied His ministry on earth by sending the Holy Spirit ... Who calls us through the Gospel – the Gospel proclaimed in Christ's Church through His ordained ministers. That's really what Luke's inspired words at the beginning of his second book – ACTS – are getting at: ***In the first book*** [that is, the HOLY GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. LUKE], ***O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus BEGAN to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up.*** [ACTS 1.1] In his Gospel, Luke carefully records all that Jesus **began** to do and teach. In ACTS we see how our Lord and Savior **continued** to work and teach His Church through the Apostles, Evangelists, and teacher/pastors.

Which brings us to the assigned *Gospel Lesson* for this day – how ***the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of Him, two by two, into every town and place where He Himself was about to go*** [LK 10.1]. Here we see already just what was going to happen after our Lord's Death and Resurrection and Ascension – our Savior working in the world by and through His appointed evangelists and preachers. And what we learn from this text – and from other passages in Holy Writ – is the fact that whoever hears (and listens to) Christ's appointed and sent (called and ordained) servants in fact hears (and listens to) Christ Himself [LK 10.16].

Christ, the Lord of the harvest, appoints and sends out His laborers into His harvest – sends them out to proclaim peace between God and man ... the angel's ***Peace on earth, goodwill toward men!*** [LK 2.14] Christ, the Lord of the harvest, sends them out to ***heal the sick*** – the very sign of His Own Messiahship ... as we heard in the *Old Testament* of the day: ***Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.*** [ISA 35.5-7] And we know this is the sign of Jesus' Messiahship, for Luke also recorded the long-distance conversation our Lord had with His Prophet and Forerunner, John, when John was in prison and sent two of his disciples to Jesus with the question: ***Are You the Coming One, or do we look for***

another? [LK 7.19] Jesus' response was: ***Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.*** [LK 7.22] This healing was the sign that the Messiah has come into the world to save and redeem and restore His creation and creatures ... the sign that the ***kingdom of God has come near to you*** in both Word and deed in Jesus Christ.

Now, we can neglect Christ and His ongoing ministry – indeed, we do ... whenever we *despise preaching and the Word* ... and fail to *hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it*. And we often fail to ***pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest*** [LK 10.2]. We often fail to heed the Word of our Lord, which He speaks to us through His called and ordained servants and through His believers – acting as if it couldn't cut and kill ... or heal and make alive just the same. Even when we are gathered here, we can sometimes miss the divine reality that what is said and done is Christ our Lord Himself continuing to do and to teach after He has been taken up into the heavens – where He has gone to prepare a place for you – allowing ourselves to be distracted by less important (even completely mundane) matters.

And yet – thanks be to Christ – this ... **His** ... Word remains powerful and effective to accomplish the purpose for which our Lord sends it ... even if it does come through humble (indeed, sinful) flesh and blood ministers. For by the Gospel-Word the kingdom of God comes near to you. So also the Sacraments of our Lord remain powerful and effective, even though they are outwardly administered by the Lord's servants. For it is really **Christ** Who baptizes ... **Christ** Who absolves and forgives ... **Christ** Who proclaims His saving Word to you ... **Christ** Who speaks His Words in the Supper and gives you His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins. Here in Word and Sacrament your Lord and God and Savior – Christ the Good Physician of body and soul – administers to you His blessed medicine of immortality ... the Gospel. And by that Gospel forgives you all your sins, grants you life and salvation, and eventually brings you into His heavenly, eternal harvest.

That is the message that St. Luke was privileged to record. And **that** is what we celebrate this ***Feast of St. Luke, Evangelist.***

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]