

LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL



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**THIRD SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME
SUNDAY OF THE WORD OF GOD**

26th January 2025

Luke 1:1 Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³ I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

Luke 4:14 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

Luke 4:16 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, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ "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,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Luke 4:20 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. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

This Sunday we return to Luke and two extracts from his gospel that are put side by side for a reason. First we read the opening four verses, important because they tell us exactly why Luke undertook this task. He wanted Theophilus and other Gentile (non-Jewish) converts to understand that the message they have come to believe is well founded and truly reflects the message of Jesus.

The second passage then brings us to the start of Jesus' ministry in Galilee when Jesus continues the age old practice of reading from the scriptures. The text is from Isaiah and speaks of the liberating work of God's anointed one. What is striking is Jesus' claim that at last this exciting promise of salvation and freedom from oppression is being fulfilled right now in his own life and work.

SEAN GOAN—Let the Reader Understand, Year B

Jesus urges us to open our eyes to the oppression that exists within our society. It is there, even if it does not affect us personally. We need to be concerned with equality for women in the Church, with the rights of LGBTQ+ people and with all those whose voice is not heard. We are not short of injustices. Today's gospel is a blueprint for all those who consider themselves to be followers of Christ. Just as the Scriptures are fulfilled in Jesus' time, they must also be fulfilled in each of our lives.

"Do something outside yourself, something to repair tears in your community, something to make life a little better for people less fortunate than you. That's what I think a meaningful life is — one lives not just for oneself but for one's community. (Ruth Bader Ginsburg)

Something to reflect on this week: When we come across an issue of injustice how do we respond? We come to know Jesus by following him, not simply reading about him. The gospel message challenged us to our core.

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT—Go Deeper

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The reading of the Gospel according to Luke, the Gospel of this liturgical year, begins formally today. To signal this start, the lectionary combines two distinct passages, the formal introduction to the Gospel in chapter 1 and the scene in Nazareth in chapter 4. The first of these gives us the motivation and approach of the writer. The second gives us the first part only of the scene in Nazareth 4:14-30 and the second part, vv. (21)22-30, is read the following week. The reason behind this somewhat cumbersome division may have been brevity – to keep the Gospel reading to a reasonable length. Unfortunately, the division of the scene in Nazareth into two Sundays makes it difficult to make sense of the tableau as a whole. It will be, accordingly, important to keep that whole scene in mind (vv. 14-30) when reading only the first part of it (14-21). Finally, this is one of the most inspirational passages in the New Testament, underlining, as it does, the gift of the Spirit and the anointing of Jesus as prophet and Messiah.

KIND OF WRITING

- (a) 1:1-4. This is a standard introduction to a typical biography of the period.
 - (b) (4:14-30). The opening scene in Nazareth expands the same scene from Mark 6 (see below), turning it into a synthesis of the whole mission of Jesus, including his death and resurrection.
- Historically, we may say there is a slender core of historicity; mostly, however, 4:14-30 is Luke's literary and theological skill, arming the careful reader before the ministry starts. The reader can also see why it is vital to read the entire scene in Nazareth: the whole ministry is encapsulated in this symbolic tableau, providing the reader with essential guidance for reading the Gospel of Luke as a whole. Such a reading also helps "explain" Jesus' inexplicable turning on the audience in 4:23-27, to be read next week.

KIERAN O'MAHONY OSA—www.tarsus.ie

Luke describes in minute detail what Jesus does in the synagogue of his town: he stands up, receives the sacred book, looks for a passage from Isaiah, reads the text, closes the book, returns it and sits down. Everyone needs to listen attentively to the words chosen by Jesus because they explain the task for which he feels sent by God.

Surprisingly the passage does not speak of organising a more perfect religion, or a more dignified ritual, but of bringing liberation, hope, light and grace to the poorest and the most miserable.

It is for this purpose that we, his followers, must work. This is the course God, incarnate in Jesus, wishes to imprint on the history of humanity. The 'option for the poor' was not invented by some 20th century theologian. Neither is it a fad in vogue after Vatican II. It is the option of the Spirit of God animating the entire life of Jesus.

It is not possible to live as Jesus lived and make him known if we do not stand by the lowliest in solidarity with all who are excluded. Which Jesus are we following? To come to the point: what impression do we have of the actual church? Are we walking in the footsteps of Jesus?

JOSÉ A PAGOLA—Following in the Footsteps of Jesus.

General comments

The reflection below is on the second part of the reading – verses 16 to 21 – a story of how Jesus read the Bible and how he wants us his followers to read it (and teach it). Verses 16-17 and 20-21 explain the method; verses 18 and 19 give the text Jesus read.

As regards the method, we are free to interpret the passage as what happens to the church as a whole or to individual members. The biblical renewal of recent years was a matter of the whole church being handed the Bible (by an assistant) and invited to recognise it being fulfilled today.

We can also interpret the passage as reminding us of what happens when individuals get down to personal Bible meditation. In this case the passage is a living lesson on the lectio divina method.

We will learn something about how Bible teachers can guide people into experiencing what Jesus did – that their experience is not unique and therefore alienating, but the Bible is fulfilled in them. Bible reading correctly understood and practiced is an experience of liberation for those who are in any form of captivity – cultural, spiritual or psychological.

We must look for experiences which bring this out. In what way has the biblical renewal been an experience of liberation? For the church as a whole? For individuals? It has certainly been liberation from bondage to elitist, colonialist, racist and sexist thinking. To what extent has my Bible reading been a liberating experience for me, or for my community? If it has been, then who is the Bible teacher, spiritual guide, community leader, friend that we want to celebrate?

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL—Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels

1. The scene in the synagogue marks the launch of the public ministry of Jesus in Luke. Jesus was filled with the Spirit and sent. He came bursting with a message to communicate. When have you had the experience of being enthused by something in that way? Who have been the people you met who had that kind of enthusiasm?
2. His message was addressed to those who were poor, oppressed, blind, or captives. Who are these today? In what ways have you been, or are you, among these? How has the message of Jesus been good news for you, freed you, given you new sight, or revealed God's favour to you?
3. The message Jesus had was one of liberation and he told his listeners that it was being fulfilled even as they listened. It is also being fulfilled even as we hear it NOW. If this does not resonate with you right now, when has the gospel given you an experience of liberation?

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