

GOSPEL

LUKE 1:1-4; 4:14-21

Seeing that many others have undertaken to draw up accounts of the events that have taken place among us, exactly as these were handed down to us by those who from the outset were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, I in my turn, after carefully going over the whole story from the beginning, have decided to write an ordered account for you, Theophilus, so that your Excellency may learn how well founded the teaching is that you have received.

Jesus, with the power of the Spirit in him, returned to Galilee; and his reputation spread throughout the countryside. He taught in their synagogue on the sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written:

The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the down trodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour.

He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, 'This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen.'

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

In today's Gospel, before presenting Jesus' programmatic speech in Nazareth, Luke the Evangelist briefly recounts the work of evangelization. It is an activity that Jesus carries out with the power of the Holy Spirit: his Word is original because it reveals the meaning of the Scriptures; it is an authoritative Word because he commands even impure spirits with authority, and they obey him (cf. Mk 1:27). Jesus is different from the teachers of his time. For example, he doesn't open a law school but rather goes around preaching and teaching everywhere: in the synagogues, on the streets, in houses, always moving about! Jesus is also different from John the Baptist, who proclaims God's imminent judgment. Instead Jesus announces God's fatherly forgiveness.

Now let us imagine that we too enter the synagogue of Nazareth, the village where Jesus has grown up, until he is about 30 years old. What happens is an important event, which delineates Jesus' mission. He

stands up to read the Sacred Scripture. He opens the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah and takes up the passage where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor". Then, after a moment of silence filled with expectation on the part of everyone, he says, in the midst of their general amazement: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing".

Evangelizing the poor: this is Jesus' mission. According to what he says, this is also the mission of the Church, and of every person baptized in the Church. Being a Christian is the same thing as being a missionary. Proclaiming the Gospel with one's word, and even before, with one's life, is the primary aim of the Christian community and of each of its members. It is noted here that Jesus addresses the Good News to all, excluding no one, indeed favouring those who are distant, suffering sick, cast out by society.

Let us ask ourselves: what does it mean to evangelize the poor? It means first of all drawing close to them, it means having the joy of serving them, of freeing them from their oppression, and all of this in the name of and with the Spirit of Christ, because he is the Gospel of God, he is the Mercy of God, he is the liberation of God, he is the One who became poor so as to enrich us with his poverty. The text of Isaiah, reinforced with little adaptations introduced by Jesus, indicates that the messianic announcement of the Kingdom of God come among us is addressed in a preferential way to the marginalized, to captives, to the oppressed.

In Jesus' time these people probably were not at the centre of the community of faith. Let us ask ourselves: today, in our parish communities, in our associations, in our movements, are we faithful to Christ's plan? Is the priority evangelizing the poor, bringing them the joyful Good News? Pay heed: it does not only involve doing social assistance, much less political activity. It involves offering the strength of the Gospel of God, who converts hearts, heals wounds, transforms human and social relationships according to the logic of love. The poor are indeed at the centre of the Gospel.

May the Virgin Mary, Mother of evangelizers, help us to strongly perceive the hunger and thirst for the Gospel that there is in the world, especially in the hearts and the flesh of the poor. May she enable each of us and every Christian community to tangibly bear witness to the mercy, the great mercy that Christ has given us.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Luke goes to great lengths in the opening paragraph to show that his Gospel recounts true, historical events - Jesus is an historical person. What impact does this have on your faith and belief?
- What does it mean for you to have been given 'the Spirit of the Lord' to be upon you and calling you 'to bring good news to the poor...?'
- In what ways do you see 'This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen.?'

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.