

St. Luke

I take as my text from St. Paul's 2nd Epistle to Timothy:

WATCH thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.”

For me, the Gospel of St. John and the writings of St. Luke — his Gospel and the Book of Acts — provide some of the greatest insight into Christianity during the ministry of our Lord — St. John for his remarkable revelation of the Person of our Lord, the Nature of God, and the unity of the God-Head, and St. Luke for his beautiful recounting of the Ministry of Jesus Christ and the beginning of the Church.

Today, we celebrate the Feast of St. Luke who served as a preserver of the Gospel, as the physician and companion of St. Paul, and as a historian of the Early Church. For his Faith, he was martyred at age 84 in Boeotia, being hanged from an olive tree.

As an aside, Luke was also an artist having painted icons, in particular pictures of the Virgin Mary and Child, including St. Peter and St. Paul.

Now, we come again to St. Paul and as he is writing this letter to Timothy, he is a prisoner in Rome nearing the end of his life. St. Luke alone is with him. He sends for Timothy and asks that he bring Mark with him.

Luke and Timothy were, for the most part, constant companions of Paul during the majority of his ministry. As may remember, Mark had a difficult relationship with Paul early on but later became almost indispensable to him.

As we have indicated, we know so little about St. Luke. He was a gentile, and a physician. His closeness to St. Paul earned him access not only to the Apostle but also to anyone who was anyone in the early Church.

From the details of his writings, we see that Luke was also an historian who took great pains in accurately depicting the events related in his Gospel.

Moreover, from the tone of his writings, we see St. Luke as a loving, caring person; we see his concern for women; we see his concern for the poor; we see a universality in that Jesus Christ is for all people; and we see a most beautiful account of the life of Jesus and the early Church.

As we turn to St. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy, we find an extraordinary look into the person of St. Paul.

Here is this "bigger than life person" facing the end of his journey through life, knowing with a certainty that he had fought the good fight for Christ; he had kept the faith.

Now, he is at the point when his life must be sacrificed, and the word he uses for sacrifice means literally "to pour out a libation, a drink offering, to the gods." For St. Paul, he was not just going to be executed; indeed, he was going to offer up his life as a sacrifice to God. Just as he had offered everything else to God since his conversion, now he was making the final sacrificial offering of himself. And for him, death was to be a rest from his labor.

This letter to Timothy, at this point, is so very personal, so vivid, and strikes a melancholy tone.

Paul begins the fourth chapter with his charge to Timothy, that he must be steady in all things, be sober and self-disciplined; he is to accept whatever suffering comes upon him; he must do the work of an evangelist; and he must leave no act of service unfulfilled.

In the passage we read today, Paul confesses to Timothy that his end is near, and he recalls those who he found honorable, and those who he found dishonorable, perhaps as a way of alerting him to those who had been deserters of the faith, as well as those who had been steadfast.

He speaks of Luke as being with him; Luke, the physician, who used his skills to tend to Paul's ailments, and to ease his physical pain.

Again, the picture we have of Luke from Paul is that he is kind, loyal, and a fellow worker. Perhaps not a great preacher, but the skills that he had, Luke dedicated to God, and his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles are a testimony to his insight, his discipline, and his ability to recount the recollections of Jesus and the Apostles, and the life of the early Church, in a most beautiful manner.

In summoning Timothy to come to Rome, Paul tasks him with bringing along Mark, who would be of great service to him. We may recall how Mark had deserted Paul and Barnabas during the first missionary journey, returning home. This desertion ended up causing a difference between Paul and Barnabas that ended in their splitting at the beginning of the second missionary journey.

But the fence had been mended, and Mark had become very dear to Paul.

Paul asked Timothy to bring him his cloak that he had left behind at Troas, and, also, to bring him the books, or *biblia*, the papyrus rolls. These could be copies of Hebrew scriptures and, perhaps, legal documents.

Our passage for today ends at this point but if we read on to the end of the chapter, just a few more verses, we find Paul expressing his feelings of being alone, with no one to stand by him; that is, except the Lord who strengthens him. Paul felt especially alone, as he would not allow his companions to accompany him before the Roman authorities.

And Paul takes the time to send his greetings to those for whom he had special affection, names that when we hear them are familiar, such as Prisca and Aquila, Onesiphorus (Oh-ness-i-phor-us), Erastus, Trophimus (tro-phi-mus), and Miletus.

He closes the letter with a grace.

This fourth chapter of Paul's Second Letter to Timothy is so extraordinary for its momentary glimpse into Paul the man. And it leaves us with the sure confidence of his faith, and of the power and strength that he derived from that faith.

Moreover, we see the realness of life in the early Church: the relationships, the love, the fellowship, and the working of the Holy Spirit to inspire and strengthen each convert to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Here, in these few verses, we can see ourselves: the loneliness we sometimes face; the need for a cloak to warm us on those chilly days and nights; our friends dispersed abroad; the love we share in fellowship one with another; the presence of the Holy Spirit in our

lives; and our own faith in God revealed through his Son Jesus Christ.

Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.....The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.

Paul is not unlike each of us; and Luke; and Mark; and Timothy; for we are all on the same journey, enduring the same afflictions, fighting the same good fight as we finish the course, keeping the faith, striving for that crown of righteousness that awaits us.

Indeed, each has set forth an example for us, as they have endured through the most difficult times and circumstances and have received the crown that also awaits each of us who follow in their footsteps.