

**Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2022**  
**A Reflection by Fr Sylvester O’Flynn OFM Cap., Rochestown, Cork**

**Introducing the Gospel of Luke**

The Gospel according to Luke will be read at Sunday Mass this year. Today’s Gospel might well be called “Introductions”. In two separate extracts we have Luke’s introduction to his writing (Luke 1: 1-4), followed by his introduction to the public ministry of Jesus (Luke 4:14-21).

In classical style he addresses his writing to Theophilus, a name meaning a friend of God. We can take it as addressed to all friends of God. His stated purpose is to show how well founded is the Christian message of salvation. He indicates three stages in the development of a gospel. Firstly, everything is based on events that happened. The gospels are not pious fiction but the stories are grounded on historical people, facts and teaching. The second stage was the handing down of these facts by the people who remembered them, treasured them and used them as the light of life for the follower of the Lord. The third stage saw the writing of these memories in a cohesive form known as an Evangelium, translated as a Gospel, meaning the Good News.

The four evangelists are like four bakers who set about baking cakes. All went to the same shop which Luke called the events that have taken place among us. Will we get four identical cakes from the one shop? Most unlikely because each baker will have a different recipe. Matthew, Mark and Luke have a great deal in common, but John seems to take for granted what the others have already written, so he shopped from very different shelves. One hugely significant factor was the pastoral situation of the local community in which the writer lived. Each writer set out to answer the needs and questions of their local community.

**The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me**

Like the opening bars of a great symphony, the first words that each evangelist puts on the lips of Jesus announce the major theme of that particular gospel. Matthew and Mark quote Jesus announcing the coming of the kingdom of God. Luke’s first words from Jesus are about the Holy Spirit. He takes a reading from the scroll of Isaiah. “The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord’s year of favour.” Luke is the evangelist of the Holy Spirit. Even in the infancy narrative, the Spirit was already active in Mary, Elizabeth, Zechariah and Simeon. John the Baptist said that Jesus would baptise people with the Spirit and with fire. The Spirit descended on Jesus after his baptism. And we read in today’s Gospel, “Jesus, with the power of the Spirit in him, returned to Galilee.” Luke’s second writing, the Acts of the Apostles, might well be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit in the early Church. Anointed by the Holy Spirit, Jesus will liberate people from captivity to sin and enable them to see with new sight.

**This text is fulfilled today**

After reading from the prophet Isaiah, Jesus rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the assistant. Then he said to the people, “This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen”. This is a very important statement. The word of God is not intended to be a document about past history but it is a living word to guide us each new today. Jesus told parables about seeds and growing things. The word of God is a seed, but a seed does not achieve its purpose unless it is taken out of the paper packet and planted in the earth. That is why Jesus took what

was contained in the paper scroll, put the paper aside and planted the seed in “today even as you listen”. Several times, Luke highlights the presence of God today. “Today is born to you a Saviour ... we have seen strange things today ... salvation has come to this house today”. And to the repentant thief on Calvary, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” Many of us can remember when the reading of the Gospel at Mass was introduced thus: “At that time”. The purpose of a homily is to move on from that time to this time. What God did in the past helps us to see what God can do today.

### **Pondering on the text**

We hear a lot about the problems and faults of today. But one of the great graces of recent years has been the popularization of meditation on the sacred scriptures. Here is a plan to follow. Begin by asking the Holy Spirit to guide you. Read the text several times, slowly and reverently. Underline a word or sentence that strikes you. Move on then to pondering on the word. Why did you underline that word? Does it cheer you or disturb you? Console you or challenge you to improve? Puzzle you or enlighten you? If you find that nothing here touches you in any way, perhaps you should ask yourself why you are not moved. Try to complete this sentence in one word or phrase: “In this reading, God is ... “

### **Praying**

The next step is to talk to God in the light or darkness of your experience. This is prayer.

The fruit of this scripture-based prayer over a period of time is contemplation. Contemplation is a word that comes from the Greek word for a measuring rod. Temperature measures heat, temperament measures character, a template measures the design of a plan. Contemplation makes one more aware of what God is saying, in calling you, consoling, challenging, inviting. A person’s life is thus designed and measured by God’s word. “This text is fulfilled today even as you listen.”

### **Prayer**

Thank you, Lord, for the Gospel of Luke guiding us this year. May we have the experience of the two disciples as you walked with them on the road to Emmaus. May our hearts burn within us as you open the scriptures for us. May we recognise you in the breaking of bread in the Eucharist. Enlightened by your word, and nourished by the sacred bread, may we be witnesses to others of your presence with us today.