

St. Luke the Evangelist

2 Timothy 4:5-15: "The Holy Gospel Heals the Hurting Soul."

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In Nomine Iesu

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Lord Jesus, You came into the world as the Savior for all men, as a light to lighten the Gentiles and as the glory of Your people Israel. You called Your evangelists from the Jewish people and from a Gentile nation in order to present Your saving Gospel to Jews and Gentiles. We thank You that You have given the third evangelist, St. Luke, to Your Church. Help us to walk in his footsteps as faithful witnesses to the Gospel truth, as willing fellow laborers to the ministers of Your Church, as whole-hearted missionaries, bringing the light to those who walk in darkness and dwell in the land of the shadow of death. Amen. (*Meditations on the Gospels*, p. 381)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the fourth chapter of St. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. / For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing. / Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. / Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who heals the deep wounds of our sin through the holy Gospel of His forgiveness, dear fellow redeemed:

The apostle Paul wrote the words of today's text from a prison in Rome. He was nearing the end of his life, and he knew it. It had been a hard life. Paul described some of those hardships in a letter to the church in Corinth: "Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ... in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure" (2Co. 11:24-25,27).

In other words, Paul needed a good doctor. And he had one. As Paul languished in that prison, he wrote, "Luke alone is with me." Luke was of Gentile background and may have first met Paul in Antioch, where Paul set off on each of his missionary journeys. Luke joined Paul during his

second journey and again on his third journey. Paul referred to him as *"the beloved physician"* (Col. 4:14).

But we have reason to question Luke's aptitude as a doctor. He watched Paul endure great physical violence and pain for preaching the Gospel. If Paul didn't stop, he could very well lose his life. What kind of doctor sits by and watches this happen to his patient? Doesn't a good doctor urge the patient to avoid the things that are causing physical harm?

Luke did not do this, but it wasn't because he was a poor doctor. Luke believed there was something more important than the care of the body, and that is the care of the soul. Paul had to carry on his mission work, even if it should lead to his death. The salvation of countless souls depended on it. So Luke did what he could to address Paul's physical wounds, but the greatest help he provided Paul was spiritual.

You can hear Paul's distress in his letter to Timothy. *"For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone,"* he said. Crescens had gone. Titus had gone. He had sent Tychicus away. A coppersmith named Alexander had done him great harm and had strongly opposed Paul's preaching and teaching. When he was put on trial, Paul wrote that *"At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me"* (2Ti. 4:16).

Paul had been all alone, but then Luke came. A movie was released two years ago that imagines the conversations between Paul and Luke in prison. It's called Paul, Apostle of Christ and would be worth your time to watch. Luke was well-equipped to encourage and comfort Paul because he had done extensive research into the life and teaching of Jesus. At the beginning of his Gospel, Luke stated the purpose for the writing: *"it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught"* (1:3-4).

Luke wrote so that Theophilus might have certainty, but Luke's Gospel was for more than just Theophilus. Luke's Gospel was for Paul's certainty, for your certainty, and for my certainty. The four Gospels were all inspired by the Holy Spirit, but God used different authors to write for different audiences. The Gospel of the Gentile Luke was written for a Gentile audience. Just as Paul's mission was to preach the Gospel to all the nations, so Luke's Gospel was meant to be read by all the nations.

During Paul's suffering and imprisonment, Luke was able to remind him of the never-changing love of God in Christ. In his younger years, Paul had been opposed to Jesus. He approved of the arrest and murder of Christians. He thought he was doing the Lord's work but was actually doing the devil's. Later on he stated that he *"persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it"* (Gal. 1:13). There was blood on Paul's hands. Imagine how Luke might have comforted him as Paul thought of the horrible things he had done.

Luke might have reminded him about the account of the Good Samaritan (Luk. 10:25-37). Jesus, like the Good Samaritan, came to Paul on the side of the road and healed his wounded soul with His Word of grace and forgiveness. Or Luke might have shared Jesus' parable of the lost sheep, where the Good Shepherd leaves the ninety-nine and looks for the one that was lost

(15:1-7). Or the parable of the prodigal son, where the Father welcomes home his wayward child and forgives all wrongs (15:11-32).

Paul could have related to Jesus' parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector, which only Luke recorded. The Pharisee went to the temple to boast about how righteous and faithful he was, like Paul who used to think that about himself. But God humbled him like the tax collector and gave him faith to believe that he was forgiven and righteous before God because of what Jesus had done for him (18:9-14).

Paul needed these reminders of God's grace as all of us do. God sent Luke to do this for Paul as a brother in faith, as a compassionate friend. Luke was an "evangelist" – he was a "bringer of good news." God likewise calls you to bring the good news to others. This world needs good news. Most of the news we hear is bad news. Every day, we hear about disagreements, divisions, and hatred. We hear about sicknesses, injuries, and death. We hear about hardships, deep hurts, and pain.

There's no getting around the fact that sin has saturated this world, and that the devil is doing his best to sow wickedness and chaos wherever he can. We see that happening in the current political scene today. If you think the devil is only working on the other side and that your side is pure in all its motives and policies, you are mistaken. The devil is an equal opportunity adversary. He wants all of us to hate one another, attack one another, and think we are better than each other.

But all of us have failed to keep God's Law. We have wounded one another with our hurtful words and actions, and where we have done well, we have not given all glory to God. It is crucial that we recognize this. The patient does himself no favors if he ignores a health condition or lies to his doctor. Just because a doctor is not informed about a health condition does not mean there is no problem.

You and I do have a problem. It's a problem that causes death and not just the death of the body. We can try to cover up its symptoms. We can try to act like it isn't there. But if our inner sinfulness is not addressed, it will overcome us and suffocate our soul. The first step is admitting the problem – not pointing out other people's sins but acknowledging your own. The world would look a lot different if everyone did this.

Repentance requires humility, and humble people can work through their disagreements. But the proud have no love for others. The Pharisees and their scribes grumbled that Jesus was eating with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus replied, *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance"* (Luk. 5:31-32). Do you see what that means? It means that if you own up to your sick spiritual condition, a Physician is here to save you.

Jesus is that Physician. We know that He was able to overcome physical illnesses. He healed people time after time during His three years of public work on earth. There was no end to the sick who came looking for Jesus. He laid His hands on these people and healed them (Luk. 4:40). Luke tells us that some were even healed by touching Him, *"for power came out from him"* (6:19). No problem was too great for Him, whether diseases, plagues, or evil spirits (7:21).

His purpose in this healing was to reveal who He was, the Messiah. He did not come simply to be a healer of the body; He came to save souls. His purpose was to get to the root of our problem. He came to spare us from the punishment we deserved by being punished Himself. He came to stop our bleeding by shedding His own precious blood. Sin was the deadly infection, but Jesus' holy life and atoning death were the perfect cure. Certain death was the prognosis, but Jesus' resurrection changed our outcome to life.

Jesus is the medicine that saves us from our spiritual sickness. He cleanses our diseased hearts through the waters of holy Baptism and puts in our starving mouths the nourishing food and drink of His holy body and blood. He speaks powerful promises into our ears, "I have good news for you!" He says. "Your sins are all forgiven! You will not die, but live! I am the Great Physician; I know what I am saying. I do not lie."

We need this good news, and so do all who are spiritually sick. The side effects of our sinful condition are many. Many things cause pain and distress in this world. And the Lord knows the suffering of every heart and soul. He wants to apply the healing grace of His Word, so that despair turns into hope and sorrow turns into joy.

Just as Luke proclaimed **The Holy Gospel, which Heals the Hurting Soul**, we declare the same Gospel to one another, both to those who believe and those we pray will believe in the future. We want all to join Luke and Paul and us in fighting the good fight, finishing the race, and keeping the faith. We want all to know that there is salvation for sinners, and that on the last day, the Lord promises to give "*the crown of righteousness*" to all who trust in Him.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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