



Worship with and through St Luke

As attention is drawn to St Luke the evangelist it is worth seeing how his writings influence the liturgy. The immediate place to start is the Lectionary, where his words are taken up in the Sunday and weekday readings. First up you have to say that he fares better than Paul! This is because he has a Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, a non-Gospel book, to his credit. The lectionary has long favoured Gospels as the prime readings for the faithful during the Eucharist, and so we see that a yearly cycle of Sunday Gospel texts are devoted to Luke – Year C.

The Acts of the Apostles is featured during the Season of Easter, with readings on Easter Sunday, each of the Sundays of Easter, Ascension Sunday, and Pentecost Sunday, across each of the three cycles. Here we see the broader influence of Luke on our worship. The pattern of a feast of the Ascension forty days after the Resurrection, followed by a feast of Pentecost emerges from Luke's chronology in the Acts of the Apostles. It is important to realize that Luke gives a different timeline in his Gospel! Each of his two books is written to a slightly different framework, enabling the author to bring out more clearly the mystery of salvation. He was not all that interested in dates and times, which were secondary to his purpose. In many ways the shape of Eastertide was inspired by Luke.

His liturgical influence does not stop there, however. He has provided the Christian world with three of the great poems of faith. These are prayed daily in the Liturgy of the Hours. At Morning Prayer the faithful sing the song of blessing from the lips of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist: *Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, he has visited his people and redeemed them ...* (Lk 1:68-79). As the sun recedes and night moves in, Christians at Evening Prayer sing in praise with Mary: *My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my saviour ...* (Lk 1:46-55). The concluding prayer of the night, known as the 'nunc dimittis', allows us to sing the canticle of Simeon: *at last, all-powerful Master, you give leave to your servant to go in peace, according to your promise ...* (Lk 2:29-32). The words from Simeon, a man described as righteous, devout and full of the Spirit, lips presage our preparation for death, as well as our retiring for the evening.

There is also a Lukan touch in the readings available for the celebrations of the sacraments and other rites of the church. However it is in the Sacrament of Reconciliation that his genius reveals itself. Amongst the many options for readings during the rites of penance two stand out. One is the towering story of forgiveness, perhaps one of the greatest of all parables, of the forgiving father and his prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32). The second is the surpassing act of forgiving as Jesus, dying on the cross, forgives the repentant thief (Lk 23:33, 39-43).

In many ways the liturgical Luke accompanies us during each day, across the Sunday and weekday cycles, and in our great struggle to be a people of reconciliation.

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