

St Luke's Day

18 October 2020

St Luke's in the city

St Luke is the patron saint of physicians and surgeons. Did you also know that he is also the patron saint of bachelors, bookbinders, brewers, butchers, glassmakers, glass workers, gold workers, goldsmiths, lace-makers, lace workers, notaries, sculptors and stained glass workers.

Did you know that different medical specialties have their own patron saints? St. Liborius is the patron saint of urology and St. Marina of nephrology; both have miraculous treatment of kidney stones on their c.v.'s. St. Michael looks after radiology, perhaps because of a heavenly light he radiated; it's hard, though, to pin down a saint such as Michael who also looks after paratroopers and grocers. Infectious disease specialists may turn to saints Sebastian or Roch, struck down by plague. St. Apollonia has an understandable attention to dentists and their patients, as all her teeth were knocked out.

Looking after nurses are saints Agatha, Camillus de Lellis, and John of God. Italian nurses can turn to Catherine of Genoa and Catherine of Siena, and in Peru, nurses have the option of praying to St. Rose of Lima.

It seems that no part of the body is so well protected against disease as the breasts: one review found 13 saints who have claims to guarding against breast diseases. The best known is St. Agatha, who according to one legend was martyred by having her breasts cut off. The most obscure is St. Mamas, a shepherd, who seems to have drawn the assignment for no reason other than his name

One of the most unpleasant saints on the Catholic calendar seems to have drawn one of the most unpleasant assignments. St. Fiacre, who also lent his name to the French word for taxi, was a misogynist who refused to allow women into his chapel. According to legend, a Parisian lady who dared enter his oratory was struck senseless on the spot. She seems to have got revenge, since Fiacre is the saint to call on for venereal disease and hemorrhoids.

Enough of this. I want to talk about Luke the evangelist. Since the quakes ten years ago, he is the one amongst the gospel writers whose human stories have so resonated with me in the anguish and striving and seeking after hope that we have been living through. Luke's unique perspective on Jesus can be seen in the six miracles and eighteen parables not found in the other gospels. Luke's is the gospel of the poor and of social justice. He is the one who tells the story of Lazarus and the Rich man who ignored him. Luke is the one who uses "Blessed are the poor" instead of "Blessed are the poor in spirit" in the beatitudes. Only in Luke's gospel do we hear Mary's Magnificat where she proclaims that God "has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1:52-53).

Luke also has a special connection with the women in Jesus' life, especially Mary. It is only in Luke's gospel that we hear the story of the Annunciation, Mary's visit to Elizabeth including the Magnificat, the Presentation, and the story of Jesus' disappearance in Jerusalem. It is Luke that we have to thank for the Scriptural parts of the Hail Mary: "Hail Mary full of grace" spoken at the Annunciation and "Blessed are you and blessed is the fruit of your womb Jesus" spoken by her cousin Elizabeth.

Forgiveness and God's mercy to sinners is also of first importance to Luke. Only in Luke do we hear the story of the Prodigal Son welcomed back by the overjoyed father. Only in Luke do we hear the story of the forgiven woman disrupting the feast by washing Jesus' feet with her tears. Throughout Luke's gospel, Jesus takes the side of the sinner who wants to return to God's mercy.

Reading Luke's gospel gives a good idea of his character as one who loved the poor, who wanted the door to God's kingdom opened to all, who respected women, and who saw hope in God's mercy for everyone. Luke's gospel is about human beings striving for and thwarting healthy community. Luke is deeply political in demanding social systems which favour the most disadvantaged and powerless.

He is St Luke the Evangelist. He is my sort of evangelist. He is the sort of evangelist I aspire to be rather than the sycophantic TV versions.

Evangelist comes from a Greek word meaning 'to bring good news'. Of course it's about Gospel, the good news. The Hebrew counterpart of this word means 'good news is that which is brought back from the field of battle'. Good news means the battle is won, and the prisoners of war will soon be released. This is the kind of good news that Jesus is talking about when he reads from the scroll Isaiah's words as we heard this morning, as Luke records in Chapter 4 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor." In other words: "He has anointed me to be an evangelist, to deliver the good news that the battle is won, the captives will be released." So an evangelist is a bearer of good tidings, good news. An evangelist is someone, like the prophet, like Christ, like Luke, who has been to the battle, seen the victory, and utters words of encouragement.

People of St Luke's that is your task.

The Eucharist itself as an act of such evangelism. Just bread and wine, but so much more. The beloved church of St Luke that stood on the corner of Kilmore and Manchester was a reminder to all, whether they know it or not, that God is in the midst of us to bring hope and new life and resurrection. Well now we are in a new place and we have new opportunities and challenges. We are the living stones of St Luke's. We are the ones called by God to be hands for the poor and dispossessed, to be champions of all that builds life and loving communities here if God wills from this place in communion with the CSN

We are evangelists, and we can dream of new ways to touch people's hearts. We can dream of ways to proclaim good news not just to the poor but with the poor, not just to the captives but in recognition that we are all captives. We can learn, with God's help, not just to say the message but to be the message, not just to write the message but to have the message written on our hearts. That is our calling as it was of Luke, and in Luke we find a gospel of hope and justice and well being for all. So what will it be then you come to the receive the bread and wine, the word made flesh, the life-giving body and blood of Christ, will you say yes, amen, I am and will be such an evangelist a bringer of the good news to all those around me now.

