

Pastor's letter

January 24, 2010

Dear parishioners,

The Gospel that is presented to us this Sunday is structured in an unusual way. The first part of the Gospel is an introduction that the evangelist Luke uses to show readers that what they are about to read derives from an historical research. The second part of the Gospel describes Jesus inside the synagogue as He reads a passage from the prophet Isaiah. After having read, Jesus openly declares to all those present both His Divine origin and the objective of His mission with us.

As already mentioned, the structure of this Gospel is unusual, but it does help us to see how very important it is to combine the historical aspect with the Word of God to further strengthen our faith.

What I would like to do in this letter is to underline the historical background of the Gospel, what it meant for Luke to bathe in the knowledge of Jesus, and to reflect on the importance of reading and meditating on the Word of God.

The evangelist Luke clearly states that he doesn't intend to write a novel but rather a book of history based on true and verifiable data. He wants to provide factual information about Jesus of Nazareth to his readers. He wants to describe events that really happened, basing his report on information received by those people who had known Jesus personally, and who became announcers of His Divinity and His love for us.

Just for a moment try to imagine yourself taking steps back into history to the time of Jesus. Jesus wrote nothing during his preaching He used very simple methods that facilitated people with their learning: the use of short sentences, examples of ordinary life, parables, etc. The fact that Jesus himself did not write the Gospels does not mean that the words contained in them do not belong to Him.

After His resurrection, the apostles immediately began to proclaim to all they encountered, the life and words of Christ. Their purpose regarding Jesus of Nazareth was different from that of the Evangelist Luke; it was not to make history but to bring people to faith.

The Gospels that we have come to know were the result of oral testimony about Jesus, written down by some people thirty years and more after His death. Many people have written about the life of Jesus, but throughout the centuries the Church has realized that many of them describe the life of Jesus in a fable-like or legend-like manner. It, therefore decided to consider some of these gospels "apocrypha", meaning 'not authentic' and therefore not suitable for liturgical celebrations. Ultimately, the Church chose the four canonical Gospels as being true historical records or accounts of the life of Jesus Christ.

Now let us return to our Saint Luke. Luke the Evangelist was a man who, like us, had never met Jesus during his life. Yet he was deeply affected by the preaching of Saint Paul and began to follow him in his apostolic journeys. In the period of travel with Saint Paul, Luke had the opportunity to write down his Gospel with facts reported by people who had known Jesus. Now let's put ourselves in the shoes of Saint Luke. As I said before, Luke had never met Jesus, but he wanted to get to know Him well simply because he wanted to strengthen his own faith.

He did that by recording any information from those who had been lucky enough to know Him. I think that Luke had no interest in writing untruths. On the contrary, he was very personally motivated in finding the truth because he wanted to form a solid basis for his faith. Furthermore, and just between us, I don't believe that Luke, as he wrote his gospel, ever thought that his writing would be read by us, two thousand years later.

Despite after two thousand years of studies and research about the truth of the Gospels, there are still people, claiming to be intellectuals, doubting the historicity of the Gospels, and with arrogance, they criticize Christianity.

Some people who call themselves Christians still only consider the Gospels a great religious book, with Jesus as the protagonist and an admirable person, whose message does not hurt and teaches well. In the end, it's only a good moral book, as good as many others.

I am sure that Saint Luke, if he were present among us, would probably be shaking his head, inviting us to take more seriously our faith, give more time to our spiritual preparation, realize that faith must be nurtured, informed, understood, investigated. But no, the four or five concepts that we learned when we were kids at school are often the only source of knowledge about the life and the message of Jesus. Some people say that they are religious but are not interested in really knowing the life of Jesus. They say they have faith, but faith in what? Where does the basis of their faith lie? Many people base their faith on what they hear about it, on what others believe, they follow the tradition from generation to generation. Whoever loves Jesus wants to know Him, wants to go deep into His divinity, and wants to enter deeply into His life. Love is knowledge and knowledge is love.

For example, if you love your husband or your wife you like to know her/his physical, her/his soul, her/his psyche, her/his heart. You want to know her/his world, her/his past life; you are interested in every aspect of her/his life, because you love her/him. The same thing should happen with Jesus.

Generally I don't like to be critical, if possible I always try to see the positive aspects of people, of events and things. But sometimes my critical predisposition comes out and... patience!

I am a priest, proud and happy to belong to the Holy Roman Catholic Church, even if sometimes, while reading here and there, I realize that in some cases our Church could do better. Still, as others have also said, "The Church of God is made up of human beings!"

During the past centuries the Church has not taught us to know Jesus Christ. As I said in the passed Sunday's letter, we received a faith education that was very closed, quite strict. We came to know the God of Jesus Christ as a God who was rigid and severe, quite different from that preached by Jesus.

Our Church has not taught us to read the Word of God. Up until a few decades ago, we were allowed to read only certain passages of the Bible. The image of Jesus was transmitted through catechism, or during a liturgical ceremony. In recent decades our Church has begun to work differently in this aspect. Fortunately in our Church there are many saintly and prepared priests and lay persons who can give us a hand with our spiritual growth, but if this growth is not accompanied by a reflection and personal knowledge of the person that is Jesus, perhaps it will be a little difficult to understand exactly what God wants from us.

Peace, Father Luciano