

## St. Luke the Evangelist and the Healing Power of Prayer

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord my strength and my redeemer. Amen.  
[Psalm 19:14]

Today, we remember and venerate St. Luke, the Evangelist. St. Luke is credited with the authorship of both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles; which means that St. Luke contributed more than a quarter of the text of the New Testament – more than any other author – so he certainly has earned the designation of *Evangelist*.

St. Luke is also venerated as the patron saint of artists, bachelors, physicians, surgeons, farmers, students, and butchers.

One thing that I did not know about St. Luke until I was preparing today's homily, was that he was an artist, and according to Christian tradition, starting from the 8<sup>th</sup> century, he was the first icon painter. He is credited with painting pictures of the Virgin Mary and Child. Beginning in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, a number of painted images were venerated as his autographed works including the Black Madonna of Czestochowa and Our Lady of Vladimir. St. Luke is also credited with painting Saints Peter and Paul, and is said to have illustrated a gospel book with a full cycle of miniatures.

Being both an artist and a minister is an interesting combination of vocations; and thinking about that reminds me of Bishop Susan Goff, who is not only a Bishop and our Ecclesiastical Authority for the Diocese of Virginia, but, according to her biography in the Diocesan Web site, she is also a visual artist who creates mixed media canvases and sculptures that include found objects.

Today's readings from scripture really resonate with me:

A portion of our reading from the 2 Timothy reminds me of the Deputy Executive Director, who was my boss at a non-profit in California where I worked for about twenty years. Every time he would complete a significant accomplishment and finally during a speech he made at the celebration of his retirement, he would quote 2 Timothy 4:7, saying: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, [and] I have kept the faith." In reflecting on this passage from scripture, I also think it is a quite apt description of Father Malm's ministry here among us at Grace Church for the past thirty years.

Today's Gospel reading from St. Luke describes activities that take place shortly after Jesus returned to Galilee from forty days and nights in the wilderness following his

Baptism by John – having overcome the devil’s temptations, proclaiming to the devil that: “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone;’” “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord, your God, and serve only him;’” and “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” As our Gospel reading describes, Jesus was beginning His public ministry and while in Nazareth on the Sabbath, he went to the synagogue, which was his practice, and began teaching. Later in this chapter, Luke describes Jesus vanquishing demons and healing, and in the next chapter, Jesus begins gathering His disciples.

Taken together, these passages from scripture remind me of that passage from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians [4:11-13], where Paul proclaims that “*The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.*” These readings are perfect for a day set aside to venerate a noted evangelist like St. Luke.

In addition to having been a noted evangelist, St. Luke is well known for having been a physician. The mention of St. Luke’s vocation as a physician and the exhortation about healing in today’s collect; which you will hear later in this service, reinforces for me the healing power of prayer and the importance of our role, as members of Christ’s Church, in this healing ministry.

Although I am now an Episcopalian, I grew up in the Baptist tradition, where laying-on of hands, was an important part of healing ministry. I have always been fascinated by the power of *healing touch*. I know that it works, because when I was a child, I used to pray with my Grandmother – who moved in to live with my mother, father, sisters and I after my grandfather died – several times a week, laying my hand on her arthritic knees and asking the Lord to comfort her. At the conclusion of those prayer sessions, in watching her walk, it was clear to me that she had received relief.

As some of you may know, I am a volunteer chaplain at Inova Alexandria Hospital. In that role, I visit with hospital patients, and their family members, loved-ones, and friends to provide spiritual and emotional support; comfort, encouragement, and affirmation; reflective and compassionate listening; spiritual resources; in some cases, a silent and supportive presence; community resource referrals and crisis intervention; spiritual care during death and grief support; and most often, prayer.

Often times, when I meet with patients, their family members, loved-ones, and friends, we will recite Psalm 121, because it is a source of reassurance that, as I like to say: “*God is in our corner and Jesus Christ has our backs.*” When I pray with patients and their family members, loved-ones, and friends, I often include an intercession asking the Lord to guide the hearts, hands and minds of the physicians, nurses, technicians, other health professionals, and care givers so that the care that they provide to the patients can be an extension of the Lord’s healing grace.

Even before I became a volunteer hospital chaplain, I have witnessed the remarkable healing power of individual and corporate prayer; which is why I devote time each day to prayer for my loved-ones, friends, and others I know who are in need of healing. As a volunteer hospital chaplain, I have witnessed the healing power of prayer on a regular basis; and this serves as a source of affirmation and encouragement for me to continue this essential ministry.

On occasion, I have encountered patients, their family members, loved-ones, and friends in the community following the patient's discharge from the hospital. During those encounters, they have shared with me how much they appreciated the time I spent with them providing spiritual care and how it contributed to the patient's recovery and the ability of family members, loved-ones, and friends to cope with the patient's illness or injury while they were recovering. For me, this too, is a source of affirmation and encouragement for me to continue this essential ministry. I am blessed to be a participant in this healing ministry.

As it is written in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, in St. Paul's letters to the Galatians and the people of Corinth, and in other parts of the scriptures: we are all ministers, lay people and ordained clergy; with the power and the authority to ask for our Lord's blessing and healing power and grace for ourselves and on behalf of others. I encourage us all to make robust use of this power and authority.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. ***Amen.***