Lectio Divina – 17th Sunday of the Year C

Contexts

Luke's Gospel (in brief)

- Composed between 80-90 CE
- Part of a 2 volume work (together with The Acts of the Apostles).
- 2nd Century tradition names the work for Luke and claims he was the same person as the companion of Paul. However, there are significant differences between Paul's writing and what appears in Luke about Paul's writing which seems to suggest that the author of Luke was not the Luke referred to in Paul's letters.
- Author is clearly an educated man and a city-dweller, not a country-sider.
- Sources include Mark's Gospel and the Q source and a good deal of other material.
- From Mark: the narrative detail about Jesus' life
- From Q, the 'sayings' (teachings) of Jesus.
- Don't really know where the other material comes from, e.g. the infancy & childhood narratives.
- Work is addressed to "Theophilus" which means "Lover of God" – this could be a specific individual, or simply every Christian.
- An ordered account of life of Jesus and apostles
- **Structure of Luke's Gospel**
  Following the author's preface addressed to his patron and the two birth narratives (John the Baptist and Jesus), the gospel opens in Galilee and moves gradually to its climax in Jerusalem

  A brief preface addressed to Theophilus stating the author's aims;
  1. Birth and infancy narratives for both Jesus and John the Baptist, interpreted as the dawn of the promised era of Israel's salvation;
  2. Preparation for Jesus' messianic mission: John's prophetic mission, his baptism of Jesus, and the testing of Jesus' vocation;
  3. The beginning of Jesus' mission in Galilee, and the hostile reception there;
  4. The central section: the journey to Jerusalem, where Jesus knows he must meet his destiny as God's prophet and messiah;
  5. His mission in Jerusalem, culminating in confrontation with the leaders of the Jewish Temple;
  6. His last supper with his most intimate followers, followed by his arrest, interrogation, and crucifixion;
  7. God's validation of Jesus as Christ: events from the first Easter to the Ascension, showing Jesus' death to be divinely ordained, in keeping with both scriptural promise and the nature of messiahship, and anticipating the story of Acts

Luke 11:1-13 – things to notice

- "Luke writes a catechism on prayer for Gentile Christians whose knowledge of the God of Jesus and of Old Testament revelation needs development and who need encouragement to persevere in prayer in a hostile environment." (JCB)
- Note that, once again, Jesus is at prayer before an important event takes place.
- **'Lord, teach us to pray'** – an ancient way of recognising different religious communities was by their distinctive way of praying. That is what the disciples are asking for. Hence the inclusion of: *Just as John taught his disciples*.
- Luke's form of Jesus' prayer will not only teach the disciples about God and about how to pray, but also about how to live and act as his followers. In

many ways, the prayer is more about those who pray than about the God who is prayed to.
- Luke's form has 5 petitions (Matthew has 6 – cf Mt 6:9-15 – 'Thy will be done…' is his addition – it is Matthew's version that we use in liturgy)
- When the disciples ask him to teach them to pray, Jesus teaches them the prayer he, himself, probably prayed. The very first word, 'Father', sets the relationship between God and us - it is loving, intimate and personal.
- **May your name be held holy**: It is almost: may those who speak your name be holy. May all evils be removed, especially those in our hearts, so that the gracious love, witnessed to in God's name, may be manifested.
- **Your kingdom come:** the kingdom, as proclaimed by Luke, which breaks the boundaries between rich and poor, healthy and sick, men and women, clean and unclean, saint and sinner and gathers everyone into one community of love.
- **Our daily bread**: the food which is necessary to sustain life (day by day) - both the physical and the bread of friendship, compassion, love, mercy and forgiveness, and the Eucharist.
- **Forgive us our sins**: we pray in confidence to the gracious God for forgiveness and we pledge ourselves to forgive those who have sinned against us.
- **Do not put us to the test**: In Luke's Gospel temptation is always a bad thing (for example, temptation does not bring strength of character, etc). The disciples pray that they may never be tempted from the Christian Way.
- **Verses 5-12** – various examples of the necessity of perseverance in prayer – don't give up!

  If a friend will aid a friend,
  if the father will provide for his child,
  how much more will the Father care for the disciples of God's son, Jesus.

- **Verse 13** "If you, then who are evil…." the key to the whole text – we are really talking about asking to pray, to live and to act as Jesus did – that is, for the gift of the Holy Spirit – that is what God gives in answer to prayer, so that we may pray, live and act as Jesus did.

- **Structure of the Prayer**
  - begins with praise of God – hallowed by your name, then
  - the theme of salvation – may your kingdom come, then
  - the prayer of petition – give us each day our daily bread, then
  - the prayer for forgiveness – forgive us our sins…, then
  - the prayer for deliverance – do not put us to the test

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

Who is this God? That seems to be the question sitting behind the First Reading and the Gospel this weekend.

In the first reading (Genesis 18:20-32), treading warily, Abraham uses a series of questions to explore the character of God. Will this God destroy the just along with the wicked? Will this God behave like a tyrant and destroy everyone in his anger? By the end of reading Abraham discovers that God is more than just - for the sake of ten just people God will not destroy anyone. The reading also seems to make the point that the goodness of the just can counter-balance and even outweigh wickedness. It also stresses the importance of perseverance in prayer, echoed in Jesus' teaching in vs 5-12.

Reflection - The hospitality of God

Many people struggle with a name for God. For some, 'Father' is fine. For others, the image of God as Father evokes traumatic memories of their childhood experience of pain, suffering, neglect and even abuse.

Alternatively, some prefer terms like, 'Creator', 'Redeemer', and 'Sanctifier'. But these terms describe functions, not persons, and they seem to lack the warmth and intimacy that we intuitively feel marks our relationship with God.

In today's Gospel, one of the disciples, having seen Jesus at prayer, asks him to teach them. The prayer that Jesus teaches them is probably very close what he, himself, prayed.

The prayer has none of the formality of those used in Temple and Synagogue worship. Instead, it begins with a more informal, warm and intimate addressing of God as 'Abba' - not as formal as 'Father' and not as childish as 'Daddy', but somewhere in between.

However we choose to name God, the term we use needs to have the same sense as 'Abba' had for Jesus. The disciples also live in the same warm and intimate relationship which God and Jesus share. And it is out of this relationship as members of God's household that Jesus teaches them to pray.

The focus of the prayer is initially on God alone ('may your name be held holy'), then moves to what the world needs ('your kingdom come'), then to what the disciples need (sustenance, forgiveness and rescue from trial, persecution and temptation.

A community which prays this prayer recognises its privileged closeness to God. But it also recognises that the hospitality of God calls the whole human race into this same closeness experienced as the coming of the Kingdom.

The shamelessly persistent knocking on a friend's door is an encouragement not to be afraid to continually ask God for what we need to live as members of the kingdom. God will not fail to share God's life and love through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

If human beings, as flawed as we are, know how to give good things to our children, then how much more will the loving and gracious God give the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who ask? The Holy Spirit who is the bond of love between God, Jesus and us - the Holy Spirit who helps us sense and experience that we are deeply enfolded in God's love, care and concern.