

## *Luke 5-6*

Luke 5 begins with the call of the first disciples. Luke describes the call of Simon Peter, James, and John, the three disciples that eventually will be close to him and the only apostles who will be present on certain occasions during the life of Jesus. In 5:3 we note that Jesus taught from Simon Peter's boat, the bark of Peter, which became a symbol of the Church on earth. In 5:4 we can see that this boat represents us, the Church, and Christ will use us to evangelize and become "Fishers of men." We should not be afraid to "Put into deep water" and lower our nets for the catch, to bring others into this boat, the Church. Peter begins to show his faith in Jesus when, after catching no fish at night (a better time to fish), Peter is willing to go out again in the daytime. When they do catch fish Peter confesses his unworthiness (5:8) as we should do in the sacrament of Reconciliation and before receiving the Eucharist. We should not be afraid to leave everything and follow him (5:10).

Luke next relates two miracles of Jesus. He cures a man afflicted with leprosy, a terrible disease in that time that caused the sick to be ostracized from the community. He cleanses the leper as he cleanses our souls when we ask him. In 5:16 we note that Jesus withdraws to a deserted place and prays, as he does often in Luke. He gives us good example for our prayer life. The curing of the paralytic came with a demonstration of faith. This time it was "their" faith (5:20), meaning that Jesus saw the faith of the men carrying the stretcher, not just of the paralytic. So friends can help the faith of others by showing their own faith. This story is especially important in the early public life of Jesus, since the Jews thought physical illness may be linked to sin. Jesus forgives the paralytic's sins and then shows them that he has power to cure physical ailments as well.

In Luke 6 two episodes of argument with the Pharisees teach us about the Sabbath. The Pharisees filled the Sabbath observance with too many rules and regulations. Satisfying human needs such as hunger (plucking grain, 6:1-5) and performing works of mercy (healing the withered hand, 6:6-11) are appropriate for the Sabbath.

In 6:12 Jesus prays all night. He does this before the important decision of selecting the Twelve. There are four lists of apostles (Mt 10, Mk 3, Lk 6, Acts 1). Simon Peter's name is always listed first. The only difference in names is that Judas (Jude, the son of James, not Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus) is listed in Luke and Acts but he is called Thaddeus in Matthew and Mark. Bartholomew is called Nathanael in John's Gospel. Often Jews went by two different names. Another point of confusion arises since there are two Simons, two James's, and two Judas's in the list.

The rest of the chapter (6:17-49) is a lengthy teaching of Jesus. In Luke it is called the Sermon on the Plain. This is a shorter version of his Sermon on the Mount which covers three chapters in Matthew (see Mt 5-7). Jesus no doubt gave similar talks at different places and times and to different people. Remember, back then, there were no reporters or cameras who could give live coverage to millions of people. Jesus had to spread the word himself until the apostles took over. In this case Gentiles were present (from Tyre and Sidon, 6:17) and he left out some subjects more pertinent to Jews and covered in Matthew.

Luke gives four blessings followed by four woes (6:20-26). Compare these to the beatitudes of Matthew (Mt 5:3-10). The blessed are those who are poor, hungry, grieving, and outcast. The woes are for the opposite: the rich, the satisfied, the laughing, and the socially acceptable in the extreme (there's nothing wrong with these characteristics in a reasonable amount). Things will be reversed in the next life compared to this one. Then Jesus presents a revolutionary idea for the Jews: love even your enemies (6:27-36). In Leviticus the second great commandment was taught way back in the Law of Moses: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18). Jesus extends this law to loving all people, even enemies. Love, do good, bless, and pray for all (6:27). Offer the other cheek (6:29). These words are at the heart of the Christian message, but how often we forget them. Don't judge your neighbor before yourself. "Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own" (6:41). Finally, Jesus says to be both a hearer and a doer (6:46). You must have faith and good works; both are necessary (James 2). Don't just ask for God's mercy; extend this mercy to others as well. If there are sections in Luke and Matthew that we should extensively study, they are these very Sermons on the Plain and on the Mount. I suggest re-reading these again and again.

**For next week, read Luke 7 and 8.**