

- The preface of the Gospel of Luke—which was at the beginning of our Gospel today—is kind of just “bleeped” over normally, but is really pretty important.
- One thing that is interesting is the naming of his reader...whom he calls “most excellent Theophilus”...
- So who is Theophilus? Is he king? Is he great philosopher? Is he important wise man?
- ...and why would such an educated man as Luke—who was a physician—find it necessary to research all these things about Jesus in order to write about them to him?
- Most commentaries say that it may be a particular person...but I often wonder if Luke isn’t simply using a literary device to address all converts and those who are looking at converting.
- ...because the name “Theophilus” means “beloved of God”—and God loves none more than those who seek Him and obey His commandments...not out of some thrill of exercising power (trivial), but rather because His commandments are the true good for us...and, thus, those who seek Him seek the Good.
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- Who was Luke? He was a later companion and assistant of St. Paul, who Paul specifically mentions in three of his letters (Col, 2 Tim, Plmn)...and whom Paul calls “the beloved physician” and his fellow worker.
- Here in his preface, Luke emphasizes his own efforts on finding out the truth about this “Jesus”. Luke, as a man of science, would no doubt have an inquiring mind and would want to know the facts... and, as we see by the very existence of his Gospel, would want to impart those facts to others.
- In fact, in stories which involve Mary, Luke will at times write: “... *and Mary kept these things, pondering them in her heart*”...hinting to us that Luke may have even met with the Blessed Mother herself, or someone very close to her. He relates events that few but Mary would have witnessed and are only found in his Gospel—events surrounding the Annunciation, the Visitation to Elizabeth, Jesus’

birth, the Presentation and the finding of the child Jesus in the temple at age 12.

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- But the primary thing I would like to talk about is to expand on the second reading...where Paul describes how interdependent we are in the Church—just as the parts of the body are interdependent.
- None of us is part of the Church—this Body of Christ—without some gift to give for the building up of the Church, and the building up of all her people.
- The clergy—and even the staff—of the Church serve in leadership roles, yes...but they cannot do everything...and are not meant to do everything.
- Each of you has gifts and roles to play in the Church. None of us are meant to be just spectators, and we all know how easy it is to do just that. YOU are the Church; YOU are the Body of Christ.
- And if a part of the body does not exercise itself, it atrophies...and can even fall away.
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- As a member of the Body of Christ, each of us has a specific place in the support of the Gospel.
- We are not here to be entertained, but rather to give glory to God as our Creator and Father...and to be imbued with, and strengthened, with His grace to go out and spread the Gospel of Christ—to lead others to the salvation for which we ourselves hope.
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- But as Paul notes in our reading today, all the parts of the body are needed for the body to operate in all its functions.
- Catechists, priests and deacons for the sacraments...everyone to support the work of the Church through material assistance and by your example in the world.
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- Many of you have probably received Annual Catholic Appeal letters from the Archdiocese for the coming year. Please consider how much you are able to contribute to funding the Archdiocese...which

ultimately helps our parish, as well as helping many poor, catechizing the uncatechized, and many other charitable functions.

- Very often people have neither the time, the inclination nor the talent to teach or to be “out front”; but one can (and should) always assist materially, and through volunteering even in more menial (and yet necessary) things to help bring the Gospel to the world.
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- To the God who loves—and lived—humility, it is tremendous merit humble oneself to serve God and his fellow man—even in the lowest place. He who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 14:11)
- When the Pope washes the feet of the poor, do you think less of him, or do you not rather admire his example of service and humility.
- We should not seek to be admired, certainly (remember Jesus’ admonition: “...*when you have done all that is commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’*” (Luke 17:10 RSV))...but we can (and should) always seek to serve, and to be example—a reflection of Christ’s love for the world—to those around us.
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- So flee hypocrisy and selfishness in all its ugly dishonorable forms, and live the Christian life we profess together—steadfastly, courageously, and unflinchingly.
- As St. James writes: “...*put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.*” (Jam 1:21-24 RSV)
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- YOU are the Body of Christ. In baptism and confirmation YOU were entrusted with the spread of the Gospel.

- ...and the Sunday Mass and the sacraments are types of “pit stops” in which you are re-fueled to go out into the world to accomplish this mission.
- In a way the priest, the bishop, the pope, are only of secondary importance—your support structure. YOU are the voice and hands of Christ in the world.
- The sacraments are here to cleanse...to strengthen...to inspire...but they are not our goal; they assist us toward the goal of bringing Jesus to the world.
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- So...most excellent Theophilus...a mission is given you. What you do—and your eternity—rests in your hands.
- The book of Sirach says: “*Before man are life and death; he is given whichever he chooses.*” (Sirach 15:17)
- And so, as Moses exhorted the Israelites: “*...therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him; for that means life to you... that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers...*” ...forever and ever. Amen. (Deut 30:19-20 RSV)

**Reading I**[Neh 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10](#)

Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly,  
 which consisted of men, women,  
 and those children old enough to understand.  
 Standing at one end of the open place that was before the Water Gate,  
**he read out of the book from daybreak till midday,**  
 in the presence of the men, the women,  
 and those children old enough to understand;  
 and all the people listened attentively to the book of the law.  
 Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform  
 that had been made for the occasion.  
 He opened the scroll  
 so that all the people might see it  
 — for he was standing higher up than any of the people —;  
 and, as he opened it, all the people rose.  
 Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God,  
 and all the people, their hands raised high, answered,  
 “Amen, amen!”

Then they bowed down and prostrated themselves before the LORD,  
 their faces to the ground.

**Ezra read plainly from the book of the law of God,  
 interpreting it so that all could understand what was read.**

Then Nehemiah, that is, His Excellency, and Ezra the priest-scribe  
 and the Levites who were instructing the people  
 said to all the people:

**“Today is holy to the LORD your God.**

Do not be sad, and do not weep”—

for all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law.

He said further: “Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet drinks,  
 and allot portions to those who had nothing prepared;  
 for today is holy to our LORD.

**Do not be saddened this day,  
 for rejoicing in the LORD must be your strength!”**

**Responsorial Psalm**[Ps 19:8, 9, 10, 15](#)

(cf John 6:63c) **Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.**

The law of the LORD is perfect,

refreshing the soul;

The decree of the LORD is trustworthy,  
 giving wisdom to the simple.

**Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.**

The precepts of the LORD are right,  
 rejoicing the heart;

The command of the LORD is clear,  
 enlightening the eye.

**Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.**

The fear of the LORD is pure,  
enduring forever;  
The ordinances of the LORD are true,  
all of them just.

**Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.**

Let the words of my mouth and the thought of my heart  
find favor before you,  
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

**Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.**

**Reading II**

[1 Cor 12:12-30 or 12:12-14, 27](#)

Brothers and sisters:

As a body is one though it has many parts,  
and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body,  
so also Christ.

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body,  
whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons,  
and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

Now the body is not a single part, but many.

If a foot should say,

“Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body, “  
it does not for this reason belong any less to the body.

Or if an ear should say,

“Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body, “it does not for this reason belong any less to  
the body.

If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?

If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

But as it is, God placed the parts,  
each one of them, in the body as he intended.

If they were all one part, where would the body be?

But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I do not need you, “  
nor again the head to the feet, “I do not need you.”

Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker  
are all the more necessary,

and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable  
we surround with greater honor,

and our less presentable parts are treated with greater propriety,  
whereas our more presentable parts do not need this.

But God has so constructed the body

as to give greater honor to a part that is without it,

so that there may be no division in the body,

but that the parts may have the same concern for one another.

If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it;

if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.

Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it.  
Some people God has designated in the church  
to be, first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers;  
then, mighty deeds;  
then gifts of healing, assistance, administration,  
and varieties of tongues.  
Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?  
Do all work mighty deeds? Do all have gifts of healing?  
Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

### Gospel

[Lk 1:1-4; 4:14-21](#)

Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events  
that have been fulfilled among us,  
just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning  
and ministers of the word have handed them down to us,  
I too have decided,  
after investigating everything accurately anew,  
to write it down in an orderly sequence for you,  
most excellent Theophilus,  
so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings  
you have received.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit,  
and news of him spread throughout the whole region.  
**He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all.**

He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up,  
and went according to his custom  
into the synagogue on the sabbath day.  
He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah.  
He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written:  
*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring glad tidings to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.*  
Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down,  
and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him.  
He said to them, "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."