

***The Gospel of Luke,  
a Theological Application to our Lives***

Fr. Konrad Shaefer, OSB  
July 5, 2022 | Conference I

**“Most Excellent Theophilus”**

Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup> just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, <sup>3</sup> I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received.  
(NAB)

For whom did Luke write the Gospel and Acts? The intended reader: κράτιστε Θεόφιλε [**most excellent Theophilus**]. The evangelist is concerned for the reader’s well-being, and that of the community, perhaps in the metropolis, Antioch in Syria.

- **a reader, a benefactor; [etymology:] “lover of God” and/or “beloved by God”**

- **an educated community, with a certain level of culture**

Luke may be considered the Emily Post (“Miss Manners”) of the evangelists; e.g., Luke **14:7-14**, with practical advice about the etiquette of dinner-parties -- advice that serves as an analogy for humane, gospel relations in community.

- **a zealous disciple of Jesus, member of a community or church in the face of fatigue.**

- **an audience who is uncomfortable with certain changes, and particularly in the questionable integration of certain sectors in the community, the conservative Jewish element, attached to tradition, and the newcomers, officials in society and benefactors of the urban church.**

- **5:29-32, mixed table companions at Levi’s house**

- **8:22-25, community in a boat during a storm**

- **9:10-17, feeding of the 5000**

- **22;39-60, breakup of the community**

- **24,36-49, restoration**

- **9:23**: “If anyone wishes to come after me, s/he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” [duplicate the exodus from slavery/Egypt: follow Jesus to the city of the promised freedom]

- **9:57-62**: follow Jesus without holding back, no strings attached. The examples emphasize the radical nature of the commitment.

- **9:57-62, three prospective followers,**

- “I will follow you wherever you go”; Jesus replies. “Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head.” (vv. 57-58)

- To another he said, “Follow me.” But he replied, “[Lord,] let me go first and bury my father.” But he answered him, “Let the dead bury their dead. But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (vv. 59-60)

- Another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home.” [To him] Jesus said, “No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.” (vv. 61-62 NAB)

Theophilus finds him or herself in the parable of the soils, the little caravan/community of 12 and some prominent women, who make up the small community around Jesus (8:1-3.4-8).

- **8:15**: the good earth that receives the seed is identified with “those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience”

- **8:19, 21**: “My mother and my brothers and sisters are those who hear the word of God and do it.”

- **11:27-28**: [In response to the woman from crowd, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that nursed you!”] Jesus replied, “Rather, blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and observe it!”

- **6:46-49**: Why do you call me “Lord, Lord,” and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, listens to my words, and acts on them. That one is like a person building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when the flood came, the river burst against that house but could not shake it because it had been well built. But the one who listens and does not act is like a person who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, it collapsed at once and was completely destroyed.”

- **1:38**: [Mary] “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

- **1:42**: “Blest are you among women and blest is the fruit of your womb.”

- **1:45**: “Blest is she who trusted that the Lord’s words to her would be fulfilled.”

**Theophilus aspires to follow Jesus and desires to keep above the minimum standards of the gospel observance and thus ensure the rewards.**

**- 3:10-14, three interviews with John the Baptist, represent 3 classes of prospective disciples: general population, public officials, the military and police force.**

- And the *crowds* asked him, “What then should we do?” He said to them in reply, “Whoever has two tunics should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise.” (vv. 10-11)

- Even *tax collectors* came to be baptized and they said to him, “Teacher, what should we do?” He answered them, “Stop collecting more than what is prescribed.” (vv. 12-13)

- *Soldiers* also asked him, “And what should we do?” He told them, “Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages.” (v. 14)

In each case the command doesn’t seem so radical; do your chores, give away what is leftover, don’t use your uniform or position to defraud or coerce others.

- **10:25-28**: After an inquiry as to the greatest command –Love of God and love of neighbor– the inquirer wants to know: . . . who is my neighbor? Jesus turns the question around: To whom am I obliged to be neighbor?

- **18:18-23**: Keep the commandments -- to inherit eternal life . . . to be perfect.

20,1,20,27 (three interviews in the temple): chief priests and scribes, spies, and Sadducees

**Theophilus, the typical member of an urban community.**

- cities, towns (**πόλις**): Lk 19 xs; Mt 12 xs; Mk 4 xs; Jn 8 xs.

- **10:10-12**

- **10:13-16**: Chorazin; Bethsaida, Capernaum

- **11:29-32**: Jonah/Nineveh

- **19:41-44**: Jerusalem

- **Acts 11:19-26**, the church of Antioch, where the disciples were first called “Christians” (v. 26); v. 29, the generosity of Antioch community; **Acts 13:1; 14:26**: mission starts, ends at Antioch

- **Acts 28**: Rome

**Theophilus, possibly a Jewish Christian, who clashed with non-observant Jews or gentile converts; more probably, a gentile Christian who was intolerant of “lapsed Catholics”:**

- **7:36-50**, Simon and sinner woman

- **15:11-32**: Lost (Prodigal) Son and the resentment of the observant, faithful elder son

- **18,9-17**: parable of the Pharisee’s and the tax collector’s prayers; “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them”

- **19:1-10**: Zacchaeus, a maverick in the eyes of Jesus’ critics, in whose company Jesus was at home

Was Theophilus a person like Marth who received Jesus in her home, the writer’s patroness or sponsor?

**-Finally, who is Theophilus? Benefactor, a person of some means, encouraged to live the gospel and to generous giving.**

- **8:1-3**: the disciples, women benefactresses of Jesus and disciples

- **9:23-25**: “Then he said to all, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?”

- **20:20-26**: give to Caesar, give to God; image and likeness

- **21:1-4**: generosity, like the poor widow, the likes of Jesus, who “offered of her poverty all her livelihood” (αὕτη δὲ ἐκ τοῦ ὑστερήματος αὐτῆς πάντα τὸν βίον ὃν εἶχεν ἔβαλεν, v. 21)

- **Acts 11:29**: collection for the broader Church

- **Acts 13**: missionary base from Antioch