TWENTY-EIGHT SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME - OCTOBER 12, 2025

If someone were to ask you who - besides Jesus - was the most influential person in the early years of Christianity, what would you say? Saint Peter and Saint Paul would be good answers, as would any of the apostles. One person you might not think of including would be Saint Luke. However, it could be argued that he had as much influence as any other early Christian leader in the spread of the gospel.

He wrote both the Gospel of Saint Luke about the life of Jesus and then the Acts of the Apostles which is a history of the first years of the Church. Together those books make up more than a quarter of the New Testament. This means that he wrote more of the New Testament than any other author, including Saint Paul. When you consider how many times those books have been read at Mass and how many times people have prayed with those texts, his influence is enormous.

The reason he is not considered one of the great early Christians is probably because we know so little about his life. We know that he traveled with Saint Paul on many of his missionary journeys. Saint Paul tells us that he was a physician. Also, it is widely believed that Saint Luke was one of the few early Christians who did not come from a Jewish background.

The fact that Saint Luke was not Jewish is reflected both in the Gospel of Saint Luke and in the Acts of the Apostles. Like Saint Paul, Saint Luke stresses that the good news of Jesus Christ is meant for all peoples of every land. Jesus came to save not only the Jews, but everyone else besides.

This is a message that would have been very personal for Saint Luke. As a non-Jew, he probably faced prejudice from early Christians. They might have been suspicious of his motives or wondered why Saint Paul would allow someone who is unfamiliar with Jewish customs to join him on his missionary journeys. It probably reassured him to know that Jesus Himself reached out to non-Jewish people and even praised their faith.

That is why Saint Luke includes Samaritans in his stories about the life of Jesus. He is the only one who tells Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. And He is the only one who told the story we read today about the Samaritan who returns to thank Jesus for being miraculously cured of leprosy.

Samaritans and Jews were enemies. Their hatred for each other went on for centuries. Jews considered Samaritans traitors to the nation of Israel who mixed worship of God with worship of idols. Samaritans also hated Jews. They did not have anything to do with each other.

So it must have been shocking or maybe even offensive for Jewish people to see that it was a Samaritan who had enough faith and goodness to come back and thank Jesus. Now, we don't know if all the lepers Jesus cured were Samaritans or if only some of them were. The fact is that the one who came back to thank Him was a Samaritan. And Jesus wasted no time pointing that

out to His disciples. In the face of the hatred and prejudice that His disciples would have had toward Samaritans, He wanted to make it clear that He came to save Samaritans as well as Jews. That meant that his disciples would have to overcome their hatred and prejudice to serve Samaritans and other non-Jews alike. For Saint Luke, this would have been an important point of emphasis. There is no one who is outside the saving power of Jesus. And if so, there is no one whom we can deny our love to.

Today, in 2025, who are the modern day Samaritans? Who are the people we will have no dealings with? Who do we hold prejudices against even today? Who are the people we believe are nothing but trouble and couldn't possibly have anything to teach us?

Unfortunately, much of our hatred and prejudice continues along religious lines, even among the followers of Jesus Christ. Many of our Protestant brothers and sisters do not even consider Catholics to be Christian. And many Catholics have deep misunderstandings about Protestants. We often don't see the need to pray with them, to share our faith with them, or to learn from them. The same is true for Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and people of other faiths. If Jesus were to point them out to us as models of faith and gratitude, as He did with the Samaritan in today's gospel, we might be just as shocked. Can we also believe that He is calling us to love them and share our faith with them?

Another group of people that we fear and try to avoid are the sick and elderly. In Jesus' day, it was lepers who were treated like outcasts. In 2025, we put the sick away in nursing homes and hospitals so that they are out of sight and out of mind. In many countries today, it is even legal to kill those who are sick so that we don't have to spend money treating them. Pope Francis spoke out many times against how our culture treats the elderly like disposable objects.

As Christians, we have a duty to the sick. It is a great act of mercy and kindness to visit them. They are at such a risk of depression because they believe they've been forgotten. They feel useless and wonder what meaning their lives have. But we still have so much to learn from them. Their prayers can lift us up. And their courage and perseverance in facing suffering can inspire us. Let's not forget the sick! Let's not treat them like lepers! We can find Jesus in them, and from them learn to be grateful for the gifts of life and health.

Both the Gospel of Saint Luke and the Acts of the Apostles have much to teach us about the love of Jesus Christ which reaches out to all people no matter their race, religion, or economic status. Meditating on these books of the Bible can help us overcome our own fears and prejudices to bring Jesus' love to those who are different from us. And it can inspire us to bring comfort to the sick and poor. Let us ask Saint Luke to pray for us so that we can reach out beyond what is familiar to us and discover Jesus in others, especially those we would otherwise turn our backs on.