

HEARERS OF THE WORD

2 Kings 5:14-17; Psalm 96 (97); 2 Timothy 2:8-13; Luke 17:11-19

Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well

Luke 17:11 On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, 13 they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” 14 When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. 15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. 16 He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. 17 Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? 18 Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” 19 Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This well-loved and familiar story is found only in Luke’s Gospel and in it the writer returns to the theme of God’s mercy and salvation. It is important to note that the scene takes place on the way to Jerusalem, indicating that it has something to do with the destiny of Jesus and with the salvation to be achieved in the Holy City. There are at least four elements in the story of interest: lepers, Samaritans, thanksgiving and faith.

A note on leprosy

The word leprosy is conventionally used to translate a Hebrew expression *sara’at*, which almost certainly is not the same as Hansen’s disease. Instead, *sara’at* encompassed a variety of conditions which share the feature of discolouration of surfaces, including human skin and the walls of house (Leviticus 14:34-57). People with *sara’at* were regarded as ritually impure, a condition which rendered those in contact with them also ritually impure. Consequently, they were to be avoided. See below for the regulations on their exclusion.

A note on Samaritans

The Samaritans were a Hebrew sect, with their own centre of worship on Mount Gerizim. They continue to exist today, claiming to be descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh among the tribes of the Northern kingdom. Stress between Samaritans and Jews is evident in the Persian and Greek periods. In some ways, they are old-fashioned Israelites, following YHWH and limiting the Bible to the Pentateuch alone. Not having undergone the Exile and the radical restructuring of Judaism that took place in the Exile, the differences between Jews and Samaritans became more pronounced. As a result there was considerable propaganda against the Samaritans, claiming they were really foreigners imported who brought with them their own false worship. See below for the propaganda.



KIND OF WRITING

This is an action anecdote, told to illustrate the ministry of Jesus to the excluded and the grateful, prayerful response from unexpected quarters. A miracle story is combined with a pronouncement

Thought for the day

Inclusivity and inclusion are buzz words in our culture. We find the radical openness of Jesus very helpful today, as we try to see the future of the Christian project. St Paul himself has been called the “founder of universalism” (*Alain Badiou*). Two comments may help us reflect. Firstly, not everyone is guided by this vision—the evidence for “exclusivism” is all around us. Secondly, in the Christian vision, respect for all is grounded not only in creation (“image and likeness of God” but also in salvation (“God wants all people to be saved”). Both dimensions are important for Jesus, for Paul *and for us today*.

Prayer

God of mercy, your love reaches out to all without distinction. As we have experienced your compassion, may we show the same love to all.

story. There are also echoes of Naaman the Syrian and, of course, the Good Samaritan.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

Skin diseases (“leprosy”)

The person who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be dishevelled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, “Unclean, unclean.” He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. (Leviticus 13:45–46)

Command the Israelites to put out of the camp everyone who is leprous, or has a discharge, and everyone who is unclean through contact with a corpse. (Numbers 5:2)

The Samaritans

The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria in place of the people of Israel; they took possession of Samaria, and settled in its cities. When they first settled there, they did not wor-

ship the LORD; therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed some of them. So the king of Assyria was told, “The nations that you have carried away and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the law of the god of the land; therefore he has sent lions among them; they are killing them, because they do not know the law of the god of the land.” Then the king of Assyria commanded, “Send there one of the priests whom you carried away from there; let him go and live there, and teach them the law of the god of the land.” So one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and lived in Bethel; he taught them how they should worship the LORD. (2Kings 17:24–28 NRSV)

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian. (Luke 4:27)

In the New Testament, the Samaritans are mentioned a few times. In Matthew, Jesus instructs his disciples not to visit Samaritan villages (Mt 10:5-6) while in John’s Gospel there is the symbolic encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4). In Luke, they are also mentioned a few times: Jesus has trouble in the Samaritan villages (9:52-53), but they are mentioned favourably in this story and in the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:29-37).

The parable and the present story share the shock of the good example of the unclean—in our story the man is doubly excluded, both as a Samaritan and as a leper. Samaria was a mission field of the early church as we learn from Acts 8 and John 4.

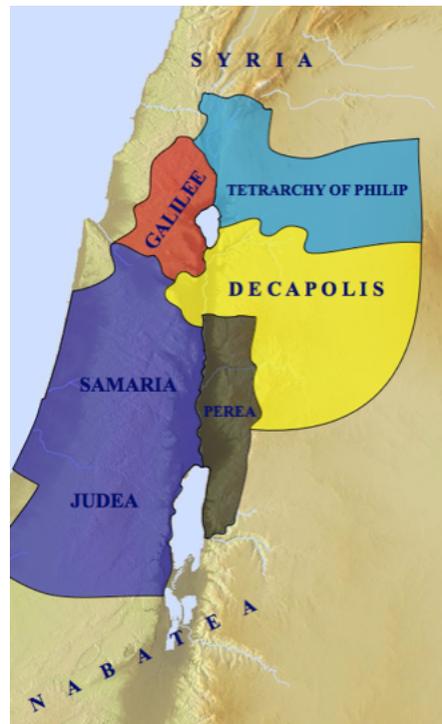
ST PAUL

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:28–29)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 11 There is no “region” between Samaria and Galilee and Luke is sometimes vague on geography. He wants to remind us that Jesus is still on his road to Jerusalem and to introduce a context for the story of the lepers. (In the Acts, Luke is much better on geography.)

Verse 12 The lepers behave very cor-



rectly according to injunctions in the Bible (see above). In the original Greek, Luke calls them *men who had leprosy*. Thus, puts the person before the condition or illness. Cf. Luke 5:18 and 8:27 for the same respectful approach.

Verse 13 Master: a title elsewhere limited to disciples (Luke 5:5; 8:24, 45; 9:33, 49). Have mercy: this verb occurs twice more in the Gospel, always as here, in the imperative (16:34; 18:38). On the lips of the rich man in Hades, it has no effect but when addressed to Jesus, the request is successful. Mercy: the heart of salvation (Luke 16:24; 17:13; 18:38–39).

Verse 14 Notice we are told that Jesus “saw them”—an obvious comment with a deeper meaning: Jesus “sees” the opportunity to show the mercy of God. The miracle is implied by the instruction to go to the priest for confirmation, permitting re-entry into society. As they go, the unclean discover they have been cleansed. At this point, the healing is less important than the reaction to it.

Verse 15 Loud voice: a feature in Luke-Acts (Luke 4:33; 8:28; 17:15; 19:37; 23:23, 46; Acts 7:57, 60; 8:7; 14:10; 16:28; 19:34; 26:24). Glorifying God is also an important part of Luke’s theological vision (cf. (2:20; 5:25–26; 7:16; 13:13; 18:43; 23:47)

Verse 16 Thanksgiving: see the Lord’s Supper, but also the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:11; 22:17, 19). Samaria and Samaritans feature in Luke-Acts (Luke 9:52; 10:33; 17:11, 16; Acts 1:8; 8:1, 5, 9, 14, 25;

9:31; 15:3).

Verse 17 The rhetorical or perhaps real question is not answered.

Verse 18 Praising God: a significant feature of the Gospel from start to finish (see v. 14 above).

Verse 19 Compare: *And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”* (Luke 7:50); *He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.”* (Luke 8:48); *Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.”* (Luke 18:42). The Greek word for “made you well” has two meanings. It means both to heal and to save. Luke has both levels in mind. Even the Samaritans (and all outsiders) can be saved by faith.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. The cure of the lepers is not just a physical cure, it was also brought the people healed back from exclusion into the community. Perhaps you have experienced the movement from exclusion to inclusion. What was it like for you to be accepted once again when you had been excluded?

2. Who were the Jesus people for you who brought about this change? For whom have been able to do this, perhaps by healing a rift with a friend, or by listening to the opinion of someone you had dismissed out of hand, or by opening the door in some other way to another?

3. Some people work hard at breaking down barriers in society, seeking inclusion for those who find themselves labelled as lepers by society or by a section of society. Where have you seen this happening? Who has been doing this kind of work? Where is the good news in such action?

4. When we do good for another we may not do it for the thanks we hope to get, but it can hurt when no gratitude is shown. How have you experienced the positive effects of thanks given and received?

PRAYER

O God, our life, our health, our salvation, look with mercy on your people. Stir up in us a saving faith, that believing, we may be healed, and being healed, we may worthily give you thanks.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead

2 Tim 2:8 Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David; such is my gospel, 9 for which I suffer hardship to the point of imprisonment as a criminal, but God’s message is not imprisoned! 10 So I endure all things for the sake of those chosen by God, that they too may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus and its eternal glory. 11 This saying is trustworthy:

If we died with him, we will also live with him. 12 If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we deny him, he will also deny us. 13 If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, since he cannot deny himself.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

2 Timothy 2 can help us reflect on the challenges of ministry today. (i) There is the challenge to the minister to keep up his or her original fervour and commitments, in spite of the cost. (ii) There are internal disputes within the community of faith—sometimes a matter of semantics, sometimes more substantial and threatening. (iii) Many have walked away from the faith and apostasized and no longer walk with us. Sounds familiar? Already, all these issues come up in chapter 2 of 2 Timothy. A fourth element may be counted: (iv) the examples of the suffering and faithfulness of Paul and, more importantly, of Jesus himself. Thus the call to a renewed fidelity to the grace given (2Tim 2:1) is made on the basis of Jesus’ own faithfulness (2Tim 2:13). We do not *ever* walk alone!

KIND OF WRITING

Vv.	2 TIMOTHY
1:1-2	Greeting
1:3-14	<i>Thanksgiving</i>
1:15-18	<i>A personal note</i>
2:1-4:8	<i>Body of the letter</i>
4:9-22	Personal note and prayer

Within the body of the letter, a section is devoted to the “charge” to Timothy: 2:1-26. The section as a whole is very rich in metaphor. The sequence is as follows:

- 1-2 Commission; witness of many
- 3-7 Suffering: soldier, athlete, farmer
- 8-13 Suffering of Paul; hymn fragment

14-19 Opponents (*Hymenaeus and Philetus*)
20-25 Exhortation; home, teaching

Our reading comes from the moment when the pastor reflects on suffering as part of the ministry, in the light of the suffering of Paul and, of course, Jesus. The preceding verses (given below) provide the context for our reading.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

A great deal of the context of 2 Timothy can be traced by reading carefully 2 Tim 2:14-19: wrangling over words, profane chatter, ungodliness, straying from the truth.

The evidence for a much longer time span is given in the early verses as follows: *And entrust what you heard me say in the presence of many others as witnesses to faithful people who will be competent to teach others as well.* (2 Timothy 2:2 NET)

- Stage 1: Paul
- Stage 2: Paul to Timothy
- Stage 3: Timothy to “faithful people
- Stage 4: Faithful people to others

The impression given is that of a context of third and even fourth generation Paulinism. The retrieval of the Pauline tradition is faithful to Paul’s own experience and teaching about apostolic suffering.

RELATED PASSAGES

Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one in military service gets entangled in matters of everyday life; otherwise he will not please the one who recruited him. Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he will not be crowned as the winner unless he competes according to the rules. The farmer who works hard ought to have the first share of the crops. Think about what I am saying and the Lord will give you understanding of all this. (2 Timothy 2:3-7 NET)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 8 The appeal to “remember” Jesus is unique in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline writings. It lifts the protection of the deposit to the level of a much more personal engagement. Significant Pauline themes are evoked: risen from the dead and a descendent of David. The resurrection—properly an end-time apocalyptic event—is the mark

of God’s faithfulness through time (symbolised by the dynasty of David). This truly is Paul’s Gospel.

Verse 9 The teaching here is that suffering is not simply a consequence of the Gospel but actually at the heart of it, as we share Jesus’ own path to resurrection.

Verse 10 This verse amplifies the previous verse: the suffering of the apostle was the very means by others were brought to eternal salvation.

Verse 11 This is the fourth “faithful saying” of the Pastorals. For the content, cf. *Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.* (Romans 6:8 NET) It is not enough to die; we have to “die-with” Christ, in the Pauline expression. Cf. Rom 5:17, 21; 1 Cor 4:8.

Verses 12 12a echoes a teaching of Jesus: *But the person who endures to the end will be saved.* (Matthew 24:13 NET). 12b is also a distinct echo of another teaching of Jesus: *But whoever denies me before people, I will deny him also before my Father in heaven.* (Matthew 10:33 NET)

Verse 13 In tension with 12b, the author evokes another biblical teaching that even if *we* are unfaithful, *God* will be faithful. The champions of this teachings are Second Isaiah and Hosea. The reason is simple: God “wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1Timothy 2:4 NET) and he cannot not be himself. God’s faithfulness does not depend on ours, thank God. So which is real, the threat or the reassurance? Surely both. It would be wrong to resolve the dialectic prematurely because it takes us to the paradoxical heart of the experience of faith: God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. Pastorally, the threat functions as encouragement to ever greater commitment. The reassurance give fresh hope to those who may have already failed.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. What has been my own experience of suffering in or for the ministry? How have I drawn life from that?
2. How is the Lord calling me, in this present moment, to be faithful?

PRAYER

God, your name is “compassion and grace, love and faithfulness”. Help us to draw on your faithful love that we in turn may be both loving and faithful to you and to our neighbour. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel

Naaman the Syrian is advised by an Israelite servant girl to go to the prophet in Samaria. He first present himself to the king of Israel and then Elisha enters the story. 2 Kgs 5:1-7

2 Kgs 5:8 *But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel."* 9 *So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. 10 Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean."* 11 *But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy!"* 12 *Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?"* He turned and went away in a rage. 13 *But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean?'"* 14 *So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.*

2 Kgs 5:15 *Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel; please accept a present from your servant."* 16 *But he said, "As the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will accept nothing!"* He urged him to accept, but he refused. 17 *Then Naaman said, "If not, please let two mule-loads of earth be given to your servant; for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god except the Lord.* 18 *But may the Lord pardon your servant on one count: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow down in the house of Rimmon, when I do bow down in the house of Rimmon, may the Lord pardon your servant on this one count."* 19 *He said to him, "Go in peace."*

Elisha's servant Gehazi accepts the gift that Elisha had refused. The prophet catches him out and the punishment is leprosy. 2 Kgs 5:19b-24

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The actual reading appointed is much shorter. However, as it is not that difficult to explain, it seemed fitting to give something of the longer version (with summaries in boxes). The abbreviation in the lectionary spoils the narrative tensions and makes compromises at the service of prefiguring the cure of the ten lepers.

KIND OF WRITING

The full story, all of chapter 5, is a narrative with plot, tensions and resolutions.

1-2 Exposition: characters and context established.

3 Inciting moment: the potential for a resolution

4-7 Complication 1: The quest seems over at the start; what will happen now?

8-13 Complication 2: The prophet proposes a test—a very simple one, too simple initially for the patient.

14 Climax: Naaman becomes a believer in YHWH.

15-19a Dénouement 1: The prophet refuses any gift; on the contrary, Naaman makes requests, both reflecting his new faith and both granted.

19b-27 Dénouement 2: In contrast, the servant of the prophet fails to emulate the incorruptibility of his master; his severe punishment is the very leprosy of which Naaman had been cured.

In a word, the foreigner passes the test, while the servant of the prophet, in contrast, fails. Within the big biblical picture, the story as it now stands also serves as an example of conversion to YHWH.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

Elisha is a legendary wonder-worker from the ninth century BC. His stories may be found in 1 Kgs 19:16-21; 2 Kgs 2:1-10:27; 13:14-21. Such characters often come in pairs and Elisha is the fellow prophet and eventual successor of Elijah. Their stories—with significant differences—shape each other.

RELATED PASSAGES

When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed. So he went in and closed the door on the two of them, and prayed to the Lord. Then he got up on the bed and lay upon

the child, putting his mouth upon his mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and while he lay bent over him, the flesh of the child became warm. He got down, walked once to and fro in the room, then got up again and bent over him; the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, "Call the Shunammite woman." So he called her. When she came to him, he said, "Take your son." She came and fell at his feet, bowing to the ground; then she took her son and left. (2Kings 4:32-37)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verses 14 Seven is the mystical number; the young boy reminds us of the young girl at the start of the story.

Verse 15 A full conversion is made and with it the expression of gratitude. Elisha seems to have had this conversion in mind from v. 8: Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel (2 Kings 5:8). That is, a prophet who does not simply heals but acts on behalf of God. Naaman makes the first of three requests.

Verse 16 Elisha resolutely refuses a gift.

Verse 17 The second request makes Naaman sound like a tourist wishing to take home a souvenir. But, the land of Israel is holy and he wishes, even abroad, to be able to pray on the soil of the Holy land. It is important that this comes before v. 18.

Verse 18 Naaman realises that his official position will involve indeed compromise and he asks for forgiveness in advance.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. The fortunate experience of Naaman leads to an evolution in this belief and to a conviction that there is only one universal God. Have I made any similar journey of faith in my own life?

2. Naaman faces a situation where some latitude will be necessary. Have I faced similar contexts and how did I negotiate the delicate balance between the ideal and the real?

PRAYER

Your will, O God is that all should be well and all should come to a knowledge of you. Help us to read the patterns of our lives and so come to know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ your Son. Amen.

THE LITURGY

2 Kings 5:14-17; Psalm 96 (97); 2 Timothy 2:8-13; Luke 17:11-19

READINGS 1 AND 3

There are strong features in common: leprosy (or whatever it was), a foreigner or outsider, an Israelite prophet, instant cure, gratitude.

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 96 (97) brings out the universality of God's grace: The Lord has shown his salvation to the nations..

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First reading

2 Kings 5:14-17

In our reading today, a good experience (being healed) leads to conversion and a new faith in God. The story is told, in part, to anticipate a similar story in the Gospel about a leper, an outsider also.

Second reading

2 Timothy 2:8-13

How did people before us pray? In today's reading from an early letter, there is a short poetic passage—perhaps an early Christian hymn—with encouraging words.

Gospel

Luke 17:11-19

All ten lepers are real outsiders and yet only the “foreigner” (the Samaritan) is the one with insight and gratitude. It happens today too, even in the Church, that outsiders have greater insight than the insiders.

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 10 October

Galatians 4:22-24, 26-27, 31-5:1

The argument here is dense. The main idea is that Christians are the spiritual descendants of the free-born wife (Sarah). Because she is free, her descendants too should be free from the Jewish Law. Hence the wonderful last line of the reading.

Luke 11:29-32

In true prophetic mode, Jesus takes on those who have *not* believed in him. He evokes great figures from the past, Jonah

and Solomon. The word of condemnation are meant, not in the tone of grim retribution, but rather as yet another call not to miss “the day of salvation.”

Tuesday 11 October

St John XXIII, bishop of Rome

Galatians 5:1-6

Paul teaches that Christ has set us free from the burden of the Law; there is no going back. On the contrary, “what matters is faith that makes its power felt through love.”

Luke 11:37-41

Because we are followers of Jesus, we tend to side with him emotional in the controversies of his ministry. But it is vital not to leave such stories in the past. Religious hypocrisy, like the poor, is with us always. The harsh words of Jesus are directed to each one of us.

Wednesday 12 October

Galatians 5:18-25

Two ways of living are contrasted here, in graphic terms. No one is completely one or the other; nevertheless, the direction we should take is clear: “Since the Spirit is our life, let us be directed by the Spirit.”

Luke 11:42-46

There is a risk in all traditions that we focus on the marginal and miss the heart of the matter. This certainly seems to have happened with *some* Pharisees in Jesus' day. It is likewise not unknown in church practice, alas!

Thursday 13 October

We move today from Galatians to Ephesians, a very different kind of letter. In fact, scholarship is divided as to whether Ephesians comes from Paul himself or from the Pauline tradition or Pauline school. We note: there are considerable differences in style, vocabulary and theological outlook. It also looks as if Ephesians is dependant on Colossians, being in some measure an expansion of the latter. Perhaps in a later period, the letter attempts to re-present the apostle's teaching for a new generation.

Ephesians 1:1-10

If we were to name all the gifts we have in Christ, how would we begin? In this

prayer from Ephesians, the writer blesses God again and again for all he done for us in Christ.

Luke 11:47-54

In Luke's Gospel, the primary “category” for Jesus is that of prophet—something very apparent from today's Gospel. He himself learned from the destiny of the prophets, finally coming to appreciate that his ministry too would come to a tragic end. We can see something of the way in this furious scene.

Friday 14 October

St Callistus, bishop of Rome, martyr

Ephesians 1:11-14

What is it that marks out the Christian believer? Who am I as a follower of Jesus? This reading names who we are and invites us to embrace our identity.

Luke 12:1-7

Previous controversies continue in the first part of this Gospel—except that Jesus no longer talking to the Pharisees but to his disciples, that is, to us. The heavy moralising is raised by the leaven of witty savings in the second paragraph.

Saturday 15 October

St Teresa of Ávila, virgin and doctor

Ephesians 1:15-23

Our reading today is a glorious, richly inspired prayer, which we can take away with us and reflect on later in the day. Our only response must be “amen, amen.”

Luke 12:8-12

The first saying is blunt challenge not to disown Christ. The third saying is a reassurance that the Holy Spirit will help us when we are threatened for our belief. Most mysterious of all is the “sin against the Holy Spirit” which, against all we believe about God, apparently cannot be forgiven. What can this mean? It does not mean any particular sin but rather the closing of the heart, in a fundamental way, to God's grace in Jesus. That too, of course, can be forgiven—but only on condition that the closed heart has been opened.