

Jesus, with the power of the Spirit in him, returned to Galilee; and his reputation spread throughout the countryside. He taught in their synagogues and everyone praised him. He came to Nazara [Nazareth], where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written: "The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour." He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, "This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen."

Christ the Lord Here we have Jesus' first sermon. He reads a passage from the Old Testament that refers to the Messiah, to the descendent of David whom God promised to raise up to establish a Kingdom of justice and peace that would never end. When he finishes reading it, he sits down (the recognized posture for official teaching in Jewish culture at the time) and pauses, meeting the expectant gazes of everyone gathered in the synagogue. Probably he had read the scripture passage with a force of expression that they had never heard before, and so their attention was riveted on what he was going to say. He looks at them, and speaks: "This passage is fulfilled today, right now: I am that Messiah, that promised Savior, that King whose Kingdom will never end." If they had difficulty believing it (and they did), and if others throughout the centuries would have the same difficulty (and they would), at least Jesus made clear what exactly it was he wanted them to believe – that he is the Lord.

It is a worthy spiritual exercise every once in a while to examine our faith in Jesus as Lord. Often we get so caught up in our efforts to follow him, to fulfill our responsibilities, to imitate his virtues, and to spread the faith that we forget about the majesty and nobility of our God. Jesus is King of the universe. He is the promised Messiah God had promised to send since the beginning of salvation history. He will come again to judge all people, living and dead, and bring this fallen world to an end, resolving once and for all the struggle between good and evil. Reflecting on this bigger picture can do wonders for putting our little pictures in proper perspective – the Lord's perspective.

Christ the Teacher Here St. Luke begins his description of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus will spend the coming two or three years traveling throughout Palestine, teaching, healing, and gathering his Twelve Apostles, whom he will put in charge of the Church after his passion, resurrection, and ascension. His itinerant career is a pattern for every Christian life, in a sense, and for the Church as a whole. He is the light of the world, and through his disciples – through their words, actions, and example – he brings that light to shine in all the sin-darkened corners of the globe. He wants to bring his truth (what he taught) and his grace (that which heals both body and soul) to every human heart, of every epoch and to every nation. This is his mission; this is our mission.

But notice how Jesus set up this pattern of Church life. St. Luke points out that Jesus entered Galilee "with the power of the Spirit in him, and the first line of the prophecy he quotes is "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me," Jesus' mission was more than a merely human mission, and so is ours. We received that very same Spirit in baptism, and we received a further outpouring of the Spirit in confirmation. Our mission in life, in the Church, and in the world is one that we must carry out depending on God's supernatural grace and following his supernatural lead. Much of the frustrations, conflicts, and discouragements that Christians experience come from forgetting this fact. We are instruments, foot soldiers, and ambassadors, but the Holy Spirit is coordinating all of our efforts. If each of us is docile to him, when the last battle comes to its close, we will be amazed at the hidden progress that blossoms forth in the definitive establishment of Christ's Kingdom. The most fundamental lesson the active Christian needs to learn is to see all things with eyes enlightened by the Spirit.

Christ the Friend Jesus came to bring "good news" to those who suffer, to free captives, and to cure the blind – he came because we needed him to come. We suffer the moral agony of incurable selfishness; we are shackled by our strong tendencies to sin; we are blinded by the sparkling allure of temptation. He came to be our Savior. And when we truly contemplate him, he attracts us with a force that leaves all other material realities far behind. If we want to experience life as God means it to be lived, all we need to do is call upon the name of Jesus and follow where he leads; he is all for us, the perfect friend, the one we can trust without limits.

Christ in My Life Many people consider you to be just one more great philosopher. I know better, Lord. You have given me the gift of faith. I know that you are God made man, the source of all existence, and you come to dwell among your creatures. You stay with us in the Tabernacle; you feed us in Holy Communion. You are all-powerful and all-loving. Never let me be separated from you...

Teach me to lean on you, to listen for your instructions, to pay attention to the teachings and directives of the pope, to live, as you lived, "by the power of the Spirit." Why do I fear failure when I know you can bring glory out of grime? Why do I fear loneliness when I know you have made me a Temple of the Holy Spirit? Reign fully in me, Lord, for the glory of your name...

I need your grace. What can I do on my own? You know what happens when I try to follow you and build your Kingdom and be faithful to your teaching depending on my own strength alone. I don't even want to think about it. I am glad to admit that I need you. Without you, I wouldn't even exist. I would simply disappear, be obliterated. Be my light and my refuge, Lord...