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# THE PATRON SAINT OF MEDICINE

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Moderator

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*The following is an account of St. Luke, Patron of Physicians, whose Feast Day, October 18, is the occasion for the celebration of the "White Mass." Catholic Physicians' Guilds throughout the country sponsor this Mass to honor him and those in the medical field. The name is symbolic of those who wear white in serving the sick. We have asked Msgr. Carney for permission to reprint his inspiring sermon given last year when the Cleveland Guild observed the "White Mass" at St. John's Cathedral.*

A Christian writer of the second century recorded for posterity the following information about St. Luke, whose feast we commemorate on this occasion. "Luke was a Syrian of Antioch, physician by profession, who became a disciple of the Apostles and later accompanied Paul until his martyrdom. Serving the Lord steadfastly, unmarried and childless, he died at the age of eighty-four in Boeotia, full of the Holy Spirit."

Contemporary historians and biblical scholars have been able to add relatively little to this original biographical sketch of the Patron Saint of Medicine. The cumulative effort of years of profound scholarship devoted to the study of St. Luke's life allows us to offer now to his interested followers these essential facts relative to his life and work. He was a man of Greek ancestry born at Antioch. His education was obtained in the environment of this cultured city. His medical education was in all probability completed at Tarsus. At

Antioch, he encountered the influence of the early Christian missionaries and was baptized, later becoming the loving companion of St. Paul during his many difficult missions and remaining with St. Paul until his death in Rome. Saint Luke then retired to Greece and wrote his contribution to the New Testament, the Third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. He died at a ripe old age, his entire life encompassed within the first century. Saint Luke was not an important figure in the early Church; he held no bishopric or place of prominence and wrote no learned moral or dogmatic epistles. He did not succeed in bringing martyrdom upon himself and disappears from the Christian scene in almost self-effacing obscurity.

Why has this man been chosen to be the Patron Saint of Medicine by Christians and Catholics alike?

An obvious reason readily presents itself. He was a physician. Saint Paul calls him one; the language of his writings indicates

familiarity with the medical terminology of his age; secular and religious traditions have preserved this notion of his life calling. Yet, there is a much better reason for his selection as your patron and protector as you fulfill your dedicated function of serving in the name of Jesus Christ. An investigation of his writings indicates the existence in his person of those qualities of character and personality that are the indispensable requirements of all who would devote themselves, in Christian charity, to the apostolate of the sick and the dying.

What are the particular features of the character and personality of Saint Luke, that make him such a fitting exemplar for those who serve in the medical profession and truly merit for him the title of Patron Saint of Medicine?

One is first impressed by the *Christ consciousness* of your patron.

Overwhelmed with the knowledge of the historical Christ, he scrupulously gathered together the many events of His life from Bethlehem to Calvary and presented them to the world of tomorrow in the literary masterpiece of the Third Gospel. With the pen of a writer he presented in words a portrait of Christ that rivals that of an artist with a brush, so intimate are the details and descriptions of the deeds of Jesus as he recorded them. Though he had not seen the Son of Man face to face, he reflects a depth of devotion and attachment equal to that which might have arisen in his heart had

been the privilege of personal friendship with his Master. To know the life of Christ was for Saint Luke sufficient inspiration toward an intense love of Christ, which love was later enriched by the love of the Church which Jesus founded, and the expansion of which Saint Luke so beautifully memorialized in the Acts of the Apostles.

The life of Saint Luke is also marked with a conspicuous *sense of loyalty*. In all probability, as a physician, he attended to the physical needs of an aging and tiring Saint Paul. One cannot but note his fidelity to Saint Paul in his many misfortunes and realize also that his loyalty withstood the irrepressible zeal of Saint Paul for the cause of Christianity, which frequently brought him into conflict with his friends who labored for the same cause of Christianity. Tact and patience proved a safe harbor for his loyalty when Saint Paul was engaged in the storm of controversy and charity nourished it when Saint Paul was beset with physical difficulty, the trials of imprisonment and when he eventually brought martyrdom to himself. Saint Luke ever remained the constant friend of Saint Paul and served well in the capacity of an understanding disciple of a more courageous and fighting herald of the cause of Christ. The loyalty Saint Luke gave to his master and companion was later extended to the Church of Christ and thus he must be held in high esteem among those who first served in the primitive missionary endeavor of Christianity.

We are presented also with a *self-effacing humility* in the person of Saint Luke. While in his writing he habitually includes information in great detail about everyone whom he mentions, he tells us nothing about himself. There is a notable absence of his use of the first person in his style of writing and one can only in an indirect manner glean items of knowledge about him, though the diary style of his writing was a perfect medium for self-revelation. Literally and really, self was forgotten in the intensity of Saint Luke's desire to plead the cause of Christ and render service unto Him. His love of Christ apparently demolished whatever egotistical desires may have existed to perpetuate himself in the pages of written history as they came from his own skilled mind and pen.

A spirit of *creative research* emerges likewise from the personality mirrored in the writings of Saint Luke. We find in his literary efforts a deep respect for the procedure of science. For, not having seen Christ, he was forced to gather his knowledge of Jesus from existing sources which shed light upon the life of the Man about whom he wrote. In his own words, "he followed the tradition of eyewitnesses and traced it carefully from the beginnings," and thus contributed a biography of Jesus Christ, which blends together in harmony and beauty the diverse sources that reflected in varying ways the glory of the Man from Galilee.

Saint Luke was a *meticulous*

*man*. Attention to small details of even time, place and weather are characteristics of his attempt to present a complete story of the Master. He is most solicitous with regard to the persons about whom he writes, seldom omitting their proper names and with conscientiousness does he reveal their personalities and their accomplishments. His descriptions of events and places are so exact that his accounts of the voyages of Saint Paul are important sources for our knowledge of navigation in ancient times.

Your patron, too, gives evidence of a *high regard for the reputation* of persons he includes in his writings. He not only records the proper name of the person about whom he writes, but it is characteristic of him to mention the good deeds that can be credited to the person, whereas less enticing and pleasing individuals are left nameless. Saint Luke shows a tremendous interest in persons as persons and seems to prefer whenever possible to speak well of them. The dignity of the human person, as Saint Luke viewed it, would never allow the reduction of any single human person to the status of a numbered item, especially in relationship to God and the Church.

Lastly, his *human sympathy*, his *great charity* and his *extended compassion* endear Saint Luke to those who would know of him. As a Christian, joy was the keynote of his life and this is so pointedly reflected in his Gospel that we must picture him as a cheerful man. Yet, where joy was impossi-

ble, these virtues associated with acceptance of sorrow come into prominence. His Gospel is replete with examples that portray the sympathy, charity and compassion of Jesus and Saint Luke most evidently takes great pleasure in recording the parables, discourses and miracles that center around the relief of sorrow so often found in human hearts.

Much more could be written and many more things said of Saint Luke relative to his person, his labors and his life. But this is indeed sufficient to indicate why he is the inspiration of the dedicated men and women in the medical profession. It is truly Saint Luke who gives Catholic medical people their charter to go about doing good in the name of Jesus Christ and to work miracles of medicine still in His name. Catholic physicians, devoted sisters, trained nurses and their associates in the medical field stand in need of the character and personality traits found in the figure of Saint Luke as we discover his portrait in his own writings. We cannot find the spirit of good medicine, we cannot find the spirit of Christian medicine and certainly we cannot find the spirit of Catholic medicine, where the virtues of Saint Luke

are not present in the person who serves God in this distinguished human profession. We expect and God expects, therefore, that you will manifest in your professional service, a Christ consciousness, a sense of loyalty to God and man, a humility that exalts others, a spirit of creative research and study, a meticulous concern for fact and detail, a ready respect for human persons and reputations, and the sympathy, charity and compassion for humans that the suffering figure of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary so eloquently inspires.

Deservedly, therefore, the image of Saint Luke can be superimposed on the insignia of the physician; it could be blended into the artistry of the nurse's delicate pin; it could be fashioned in thread on the uniform of every nurse aid; it could be woven into the garment of every vowed sister; and, it could be placed in mosaic or marble atop the entrance to every hospital edifice. Yet, these things our times and our generation will not everywhere allow. One must ask, therefore, that you carry your patron in the sanctuary of your hearts and his ideals make real in the daily practice of medicine.

