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## October 18 Feast of St. Luke, Patron of Physicians

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When William Harvey of England, the discoverer of the circulation of the blood, entered the medical school of the University of Padua in Venice as a freshman in 1598, it is recorded that the academic year began on October the 18th with the celebration of the Mass in honor of St. Luke. The opening of the school year on this feast day was not simply a chronological accident. For St. Luke in a very particular manner was and is central to the tradition and practice of medicine.

It is a significant revelation that St. Paul, the great Jewish convert, referred to his fellow apostle St. Luke, the great gentile convert, as "my beloved Luke, the Physician." And St. Paul, imprisoned and infirm with "the time of his dissolution at hand" in writing to Timothy that "Demas hath left me, loving this world, and is gone to Thessalonica, Crescens into Galatia, Titus into Dalmatia, *only Luke is with me,*" typifies for all time the role of the physician, and the life of dedication to his fellow men that Luke practiced throughout his active career.

The age of Harvey and Galileo, who were fellow students at Padua, marked one of those revolutionary and dramatic epochs in the progress of science. The age was characterized by fearless scientists who were God-fearing men. Today we are in the midst of another revolutionary and dramatic moment in the history of science. Today, however, many of our fearless scientists are not such God-fearing men. The marvelous advances of modern science have sometimes functioned to produce darkness and unhappiness. The celebration of the Feast of St. Luke focuses more than ever the need for the guidance and governance that comes with a true love of God and the Son of God, the Divine Healer.

In an age of mass specialization, mass building programs, mass medical centers, mass medical research, it is crucial that the mass approach does not displace the recognition of the intrinsic human dignity possessed by each individual patient. St. Luke records that when Christ at the end of a particularly busy day was confronted with a great mass of the sick, He did not perform a mass miracle. Rather, "He, laying His hand on *every* one of them, healed them."

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