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Homily for January 24, 2010

## Introduction

We begin this Sunday with the "Year of Luke." Most of the Gospel readings from now until the First Sunday of Advent next November, especially during Ordinary Time, will come from the Lucan tradition. For a moment, then, a comment or two on this third of the "synoptic" Gospels (Matthew and Mark, of course, are the others).

Tradition holds that Luke was a physician - an educated man, as evidenced in his elegant and precise writing style ("I have decided, after studying everything accurately anew, to write it down in orderly sequence for you... so that you may know the certainty of the teaching you have received.")

We also notice in Luke's Gospel the writer's attention to details. For example, in today's account of Jesus' early return to his hometown, the text mentions Jesus' habit of going to the synagogue on the Sabbath; or how he handed the scroll back to the attendant; or the fact that all eyes in the synagogue that day were on Jesus. Tradition helps us here in its claim that Luke more than likely was close to Jesus' Mother, Mary, in her later years and learned from her many of the details cited in his Gospel.

Finally, this Gospel demonstrates a concern for and appreciation of the poor. It may well be that the Lucan community which surrounded this Gospel-writer was like ours - trying to figure out how best to serve the poor in the spirit of Jesus.

## I

Those few remarks provide a seamless segue to the events of the past ten days in Haiti.

In the announcements at the end of today's Mass you will hear that in last Sunday's collection we gathered nearly \$47,000 for Haitian relief! That is simply wonderful and we are enormously grateful for such an outpouring of generosity on behalf of our suffering sisters and brothers to the south. It is part of world-wide effort to help Haiti in this tragic moment. One cannot say enough about such good will.

## II

However, as columnist Daniel Schorr commented on National Public Radio's Weekend Edition yesterday, in a few weeks or months the world will conclude that we have done our part and wonder why Haiti isn't fixed as yet. Thus it seems important to look a little deeper at that country now that it has our attention and see why it isn't easily "fixed."

## III

Consider, for example, the long-standing, historic injustices done to Haiti:

- Perhaps we don't know that our country's recognition of Haiti's independence in the early 19th Century was delayed nearly fifty years; the celebrated libertarians, "fathers of our country", like Jefferson, Monroe and Madison, refused to acknowledge this new country in the Caribbean for fear that the Afro-American population of the United States might imitate their black sisters and brothers in Haiti and strike for independence here; thus Haiti was born and lived for nearly half-a-century as an orphan nation in the Western Hemisphere - a dirty little secret from U.S. history.
- One principal and devastating economic problem in Haiti has been its deforestation - denuding the country's trees and using the wood to pay indemnity to foreign countries, beginning with its former colonial master, France; today only 2% of Haiti's land mass has any trees, resulting in a massive erosion of its soil.
- Haiti has suffered from endemic political instability throughout most of its two hundred year history, instability caused often by interference from outside governments, including our own, even in very recent times

#### IV

Haiti, indeed, needs immediate help.

It also needs long term-investment on equitable terms.

It especially needs relationships with other countries, based on justice.

Charity toward Haiti is good; Justice toward Haiti is fundamental.

#### Conclusion

As we conclude a week during which we in the U.S. have marked once again the birth of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., one wonders what he would say regarding Haiti today were he still with us. It may be presumptuous for me to suggest, but I do believe that this modern American prophet would quote today's Gospel from Luke - in which we heard Jesus speak of his own vocation in terms of "preaching good news to the poor" - "giving sight to the blind"; achieving release for prisoners" and "proclaiming a day of the Lord's favor".

I believe Dr. King would challenge the U.S. to BE good news for Haiti's poor; to take the blinders from our eyes regarding the perennial problems that face that nation; he would demand that the international community release Haiti from its economic and political prison, thereby proclaiming and achieving a day in Haiti that is favorable to the Lord.