

Proper 4

*Sunday between 29 May and 4 June, if after Trinity Sunday •
Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time*

Principal Service readings

1 Kings 8.22-23,41-43	Solomon prays before the altar of the Lord
Psalms 96.1-9	Sing to the Lord and praise his greatness
Galatians 1.1-12	The true gospel received through the revelation of Jesus Christ
Luke 7.1-10	Jesus heals the gentile centurion's slave at a distance

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Cure of the centurion's servant

After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ²A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. ³When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. ⁴When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, 'He is worthy of having you do this for him, ⁵for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us.' ⁶And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, 'Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; ⁷therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. ⁸For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, "Go", and he goes, and to another, "Come", and he comes, and to my slave, "Do this", and the slave does it.' ⁹When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, 'I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.' ¹⁰When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

Luke 7.1-10 NRSV¹

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Comments and Questions

This story follows on from the Sermon on the Plain (7.1). Luke's version is midway between Matthew (8.5-13) and John (4.46b-54). Matthew has the same character and situation; in John there is a ruler and a sick son. The 'Jewish elders' (7.3) are local leaders, not 'the elders of the people' who sat in the Sanhedrin, and who caused problems for the first Christians (cf. Luke 9.22; 20.1; 22.52; Acts 4.5, 8, 23; 25.15). The centurion seems to be a benefactor of the community, so the elders went not under orders but out of gratitude (7.4). The story recalls that of Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5.1-14).

Luke introduces the Jewish elders as messengers, who can then praise the centurion's generosity (cf. 12.33). This addition also ensures that the centurion does not have to meet Jesus, thus reserving the gentile mission for Acts.

Whereas the elders stress the centurion's good works as evidence of his worthiness, Jesus highlights his faith. The implication is that faith (in Jesus) has a higher value than the law.

This story is part of a set (7.1-10 centurion's servant, 11-17 widow's son, 18-35 John the Baptist, 36-50 forgiving of sinful woman), presenting Jesus as a proclaimer of good news to the poor. These respond to an earlier part of Luke's story, and are the narrative fulfillment of the programmatic prophecy of Luke 4.25-27.²

Quotations

1

Fear imprisons, faith liberates; fear paralyzes, faith empowers; fear disheartens, faith encourages; fear sickens, faith heals; fear makes useless, faith makes serviceable.

Harry Emerson Fosdick, 1878–1969

2

If I am content to heal a hurt slightly, saying 'Peace, peace', where is no peace; if I forget the poignant word 'Let love be without dissimulation'

² *The Gospel of Luke* / Luke Timothy Johnson. - Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1991. - p.120.

2

and blunt the edge of truth, speaking not right things but smooth things, then I know nothing of Calvary love.

Amy Carmichael, 1867–1951

Related topics

For further study:

Ecumenism; faith; evangelisation; image of God

Closing Prayer

God of the nations,
whose will it is that all be saved
and come to knowledge of the truth,
grant that your gift of faith
may be alive in every heart,
so that, unworthy as we are,
we may welcome your Son
and find healing in his word.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers · Ordinary Time 9, Year C³

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³ *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary* / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. - Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.