

**July 18, 2010**

St. Stephen of Constantinople

### **Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings**

When St. Luke wrote, "Jesus increased in wisdom" (2:52), he not only stated a fact, but he also, I believe, initiated a line of reflection to regard other facts in the life and ministry of Jesus. Luke, throughout his narrative, invited us to observe the Lord's continuing growth in wisdom.

We discern an early instance of this interest in a scene near the beginning of Jesus' public ministry: "So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, / Because He has anointed Me / To preach the gospel to the poor; / He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, / To proclaim liberty to the captives / And recovery of sight to the blind, / To set at liberty those who are oppressed; / To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.' Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'" (Luke 4:16-21).

Up to this point in the story---although we know that "He taught in their synagogues" (4:15)---there has been no detailed description of Jesus' teaching. In the present text, however, we find the full programmatic format of the Lord's ministry: preaching the Gospel, healing the blind, liberating those in bondage, and relieving the various afflictions of the oppressed. This Isaian text is a preview, as it were, of what is soon to come.

What is perhaps most striking about this text is its "voice"---*who* is speaking? By declaring, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing," Jesus identifies Himself as the "voice"---the "Me"---of the text. This identification is given "from within." In the Isaian passage Jesus recognizes Himself as the person speaking, or the Scripture becomes the medium of His self-reflection. He measures His ministry and calling---He knows God's will for Him---through His self-awareness expressed in the inspired words of the Prophet. Those words, He perceives, concern Himself: *He* speaks. This is not an external semantic reference but the expression of an immediate, internal subjectivity.

A key to this expression is the opening line of the Isaian text: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me [*ep' eme*]." This reference to the descent of the Spirit supports the whole scene. Luke, in his description of our Lord's baptism, had indicated how Jesus knew Himself to be the "Me" in this prophecy: "And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him [*ep' avton*]." It was in the

descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him that Jesus was addressed by the Father as "You": "*You* are My beloved Son; in *You* I am well pleased" (3:22, emphasis added).

This personal experience of the Spirit's descent, to confirm the testimony of the Father's address, is integral to Jesus' self-awareness. By reason of that personal experience---the testimony of the Holy Spirit---He knows Himself as the "Me" in the Isaian prophecy. For this reason He is able to read that prophecy in the synagogue, not as an ancient record, but as the proclamation, to Israel, of His personal presence: "*Today* this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (emphasis added). In His proclamation of the text, Jesus takes personal possession of the prophecy and assumes full, immediate command of its message.

No one else in the world could have read the prophecy as Jesus did, claiming complete ownership of it. His hearers in the synagogue sensed the difference, Luke implies, inasmuch as "the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him." This stunning description captures the full drama of the moment: the self-revelation of Jesus---the existential presentation of Himself to Israel through the prophetic words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon *Me*."

The passage of time also seems important in this respect: In the interval separating the Lord's baptism and the scene in the synagogue, the reader senses His growth in wisdom. Between the two events, the wisdom of the first has "increased," to attain the further maturity revealed in the second. During that interval, Luke tells us, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee" (4:14). This reference to "the power of the Spirit" serves to connect these two dramatic Spirit-events in the augmented self-understanding of Jesus.

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