

A lover of money becomes greedy for God, St. Matthew

The Feast of St. Matthew is on September 21 in the Roman Catholic Church. Matthew, the Evangelist who wrote the Gospel that appears first in the Christian scriptures, was born in Galilee, the son of Alpheus (Mk 2:14). His original name was Levi until it was changed by Jesus. The Apostle and Evangelist Matthew, like the Evangelist John, was one of the twelve Apostles, whereas the Evangelists Mark and Luke were of the Seventy.

Matthew is the only Evangelist who shares the eight beatitudes with his readers. His Gospel faithfully details how Jesus described who will be blessed by God in the Kingdom and the attitudes and actions that are lived out by those who follow the new law by loving God and neighbor. After Jesus' Ascension, Matthew preached the gospel in early Christian communities he established in Ethiopia and other parts of the African continent. Tradition tells us that he died a martyr.

Matthew was at work in the city of Capernaum, a bustling town with a customs house. It was just another day, and Matthew was going about his job of collecting taxes. Nearby, Jesus was doing his job too, curing a paralyzed man. It was an ordinary day for both. But after performing His miracle, Jesus walked down the main street of Capernaum, saw Matthew outside of the customs house, and then...the normal day ended. Jesus said to Matthew, simply, directly, and with force, "Follow me." And then something astonishing happened. Matthew followed Him. In an instant, Matthew's life changed forever and always.

People leave their jobs for all sorts of reasons: more pay, better opportunity, a shorter commute. Mathew left his job for a better boss. We can understand the type of employment Levi had, and how his countrymen thought of his trade, by reading what he wrote regarding publicans in his Gospel. Many people felt that he was unworthy to be chosen as a follower of Jesus because he worked for the Romans as a tax collector.

We know that Matthew was a publican: he collected taxes from the Jews to give to the Romans. Publicans were looked down upon and considered sinners; as such, they lived apart and were despised by others. One could hardly eat, speak or pray with the likes of these. For the people, they were traitors: they extorted from their own to give to others. Publicans belonged to this social class.

Jesus, on the other hand, stopped; he did not quickly take his distance. He looked at Matthew calmly, peacefully. He looked at him with eyes of mercy; he looked at him as no one had ever looked at him before. And this looks unlocked

Matthew's heart; it set him free, it healed him, it gave him hope, a new life, as it did to Zacchaeus, to Bartimaeus, to Mary Magdalene, to Peter, and to each of us. **Even if we do not dare raise our eyes to the Lord, he looks at us first. This is our story, and it is like that of so many others. Each of us can say: "I, too, am a sinner, whom Jesus has looked upon". I ask you, in your homes or in the Church, to be still for a moment and to recall with gratitude and happiness those situations, that moment, when the merciful gaze of God was felt in our lives.**

Jesus' love goes before us, his look anticipates our needs. He can see beyond appearances, beyond sin, beyond failures and unworthiness. He sees beyond our rank in society. He sees beyond this, to our dignity as sons and daughters, a dignity at times sullied by sin, but one which endures in the depth of our soul. He came precisely to seek out all those who feel unworthy of God, unworthy of others. Let us allow Jesus to look at us. Let us allow that look to become our joy, our hope.

Christ passes by in every life. Everyone has their chance to say "Yes" or "No," to stay or follow, to change or remain the same. That moment may come only once and never return. Sudden callings, and sudden conversions, are rare, but they do happen. A life is more likely to plot gradually up or down like a line on a graph than to take a sharp right angle in either direction. He opens the way and invites us to follow him.

He challenges us with the question: Do we believe it is possible that a tax collector can become a servant? Do we believe it is possible that a traitor can become a friend? Do we believe it is possible that the son of a carpenter can be the Son of God?" His gaze transforms our way of seeing things, his heart transforms our hearts.

Saint Matthew, you made the right decision at the right time and so changed your life and those of millions of others who know Christ because of you. Help us to recognize when a pivot point arrives in our own life, when we must change direction, and help us to choose that direction well. **Happy Feast of St. Mathew.**

Be Blessed and Be a Blessing.

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