

Feast of St. Matthew

September 21

Eph 4: 1-7, 11-13

Psalm 19: 2-3, 4-5

Matthew 9: 9-13

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Today's gospel contains a triple marvel, both for Matthew and for us:

- a) First, there is the simple fact that Jesus approaches Matthew and looks him in the eye. As a Jew collecting taxes for the Romans, Matthew had probably long since gotten used to his fellow Jews never coming any closer than necessary, and never quite meeting his eye. They paid their taxes, but paid as little notice to the tax collector as they could. Of course, Matthew knew that he could not approach his countrymen, would never be invited to their homes, could never enter their synagogue or speak to them on the street. But Jesus approaches him, and looks him in the eye. Capernaum was not that large a town. Jesus' reputation as a holy man, a wonder worker, had no doubt preceded him, so that even someone like Matthew had heard of him. How surprising, then, must the approach of the Lord been for Matthew? He must have wondered what was going on, wondered if Jesus was making a mistake, if he was unaware of what Matthew was.
- b) And then the second marvel: Jesus speaks to him. How Matthew's skin must have tingled, how his pulse must have jumped, how the world must have seemed slightly off-balance as the holy man who approached him and met his eye now addressed him. Matthew must have been dumbstruck: indeed, the gospel records no response on his part. His soul must have flooded with amazement and wonder.
- c) And then the final marvel: Jesus picks him. To what could we compare it? Ever since we were children, hoping to be picked for a team on the schoolyard, hoping to be asked to the dance, hoping to be accepted by a college or a company or a club, hoping to be recognized and acknowledged - ever since we were children, we have known the longing to be picked, to be chosen, to be set apart, to be lifted up for a special recognition, a reward, an opportunity. Matthew is chosen. The Lord approaches, looks in his eyes, and utters the simple, life-changing words, "Follow me." Imagine Matthew's state of mind, the racing of his heart, the electrical charge that ran through his limbs and warmed his eyes and roared in his ears. "The holy man, the wonder-worker, the friend of sinners, the man every person in town is watching - he has picked me! Out of every criminal and outcast, out of every merchant and teacher, out of all the town elders and upstanding men, he has picked me!" And Matthew gets up and follows. Does he roll up his records and shove all his coins into a bag? Does he turn and ask an assistant to take his place at the table? Does he scrawl a quick letter of resignation for the authorities? No: he gets up and he goes. He has been chosen.

And so have we. Praise God, each of us has been called, selected, picked out, lifted up, set apart, elected. Despite our sins - because of our sins - the Lord approaches us. He looks us in the eye, he speaks to us, he says, "Follow me." Each of us can look at ourselves and say, "I am the one. The Lord has chosen me." We can all take heart from Saint Matthew, to the eyes of the world an unlikely apostle, an unusual choice, a surprising pick; but in the eyes of Christ, a man called to the greatness of service and suffering, a man chosen to proclaim the Gospel, a man called by Christ, just like all of us.