

The Encounter

Homily for January 14, 2023

Today I want to consider with you three phrases from the Gospel. They are pictures of our encounter with Jesus. They are

- He Got up and followed Him.
- While he was at table in his house
- Why Does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners

Let us now look at each in turn.

He Got Up and Followed Him: “‘He rose and followed him.’ The conciseness of the phrase clearly underlines Matthew’s promptness in response to the call.... In this ‘rising’ one can see the detachment from a situation of sin and, at the same time, the conscious adherence to a new life, upright, in communion with Jesus” (Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, August 30, 2006). Holiness of life is not simply separation from what is sinful, but a participation in the love and holiness of God. It is not just separation from something, but transformation into the someone God has created us to be. When he calls, Jesus never gives us a map, only a compass. We do not see the full picture, we simply know the direction. Each day he invites us to follow him, to deepen the communion of love with him, and to keep our eyes fixed on him as on a “lamp shining in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19). Matthew really had no clue where his life would end up. But he did know that it had to change and where that change needed to begin. Matthew was so utterly convinced that Jesus was worthy of his trust that he surrendered his life to him. We must daily choose to follow Matthew’s example of how to follow Jesus.

While He Was at Table in His House: “Behold! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me” (Revelation 3:20). They are celebrating Matthew’s vocation to follow Jesus. Matthew could have said “no” or “not yet” or “not now.” But consider the effects if such a refusal had taken place. For starters, there would have been no dinner feast, and consequently many of Matthew’s friends would have missed an intimate encounter with Jesus that night – an encounter that forever changed some of their lives. Jesus knocked at the door of Matthew’s life, and Matthew opened it wide to Jesus. Then, like the Samaritan woman, he ran to get others so that they too might meet Jesus. By way of Matthew’s “yes,” Jesus started touching the lives of others. Whenever we say “yes” to Jesus, he will work not only in us but also through us. Once again, today he will invite us to say “yes” to his will and thereby be his instrument of grace for others. “I am standing at the door, knocking....”

Why Does Your Teacher Eat with Tax Collectors and Sinners? He does so that we might learn two lessons: the depth of his love for every soul, and how we must love others unconditionally. “God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Loving a person unconditionally does not mean that we blithely accept their sin. We love them despite their sin and in the hope that one day they will leave it aside. Mercy is the one form of love that we can never directly exercise toward God, yet it is his greatest

expression of love for each one of us. Through Jesus' dying on a cross for the forgiveness of our sins, God has revealed the pinnacle of love. Thus, when we practice mercy, forgiveness, patience, etc. towards those around us, we are imitating the highest form of love. Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners for the same reason he called Matthew to follow him: because he loves us and wants to share his life with us.

God our Father, in your eyes, I am like a little child whom you tenderly watch over. God the Son, in your eyes, I am like a poor, helpless sheep whom you gently pick up and carry when I'm worn out from my sins. God the Holy Spirit, in your eyes, I am like a dry piece of wood that you wish to set ablaze with the fire of your love. Thank you, Holy Trinity, for wanting to bring me into your holy friendship. I am completely unworthy of your love but grateful to find rest and a true home in you.