

***The Feast of St. Matthew: September 21<sup>st</sup> 2018***

As you might already know, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke share many similarities in style and content. They all, for instance, have parables like that of the Sower. How they arrange their material is very different as this parable illustrates. Luke has the Parable independent from any other parable whereas Matthew and Mark have it as the parable introducing whole chapters of Parables, Matthew 13 and Mark 4.

Interestingly though this is not the case with the calling of Matthew. In all three gospels the story immediately preceding today's reading is the healing of a paralytic. You will remember that this paralysed man was brought to Jesus by the man's friends. Mark gives the most detail, including that they made an opening in the roof to get the man to Jesus.

I pondered, why is it the case that the three Gospel writers include the healing of the paralytic right before the call of Matthew? Here is my speculative answer. Matthew too was a man paralysed; not physically but spiritually because of his preoccupation with wealth. Just as Jesus healed the man with the physical disability so too Matthew was healed of the capital sin of avarice as he responded to the Lord's call.

I think this painting by Caravaggio, entitled ***The Calling of Matthew*** captures vividly the freedom Jesus was inviting Matthew to discover. This painting is in Rome in a chapel of the Church ***San Luigi dei Francesi***. Notice how the scene is one of complete darkness the farther you look to the left. At the far right, from where the light is emanating is Jesus, standing with St. Peter. His hand is right under the window, where we see the Cross clearly depicted. He is pointing to Matthew, the character who is pointing to himself with his left hand and holding onto the money with his right. Notice the older man to Matthew's right and the younger man to his far right, for us the left side of the painting. They are completely absorbed with the money, paying no attention to Jesus at all.

Now look at this close up of Matthew. Just like the paralytic heard the Lord's invitation to arise from his life of physical bondage, here Jesus is doing the same with Matthew.

***Arise from your bondage to wealth Matthew.***

Let's turn back to the complete painting. What is Caravaggio teaching us here and what does this Feast of St. Matthew emphasize?

All resistance to grace hardens the heart as we see with the two ignoring the light. But Matthew and the lad next to him are looking to Jesus and thus responding to grace. The lad straddling the bench seems to be looking off into the distance in a daydream, perhaps indifferent to Jesus' presence.

St Augustine describes very succinctly the urgency with which we should respond to God's gift, to his passing close by:

***'I fear Jesus may pass by and not come back'.***

In a world like this where the lure for wealth can lead to the hardening of the heart or indifference to a kind of carelessness, we are to be those not only awakened by the light of Jesus presence but want to invite others to also sit at table and experience the healing of Christ Jesus the Great Physician.

I invite us now to take a few minutes to silently meditate on this painting as it speaks into each of our hearts....



