

Homily For the Feast of St. Matthew, Apostle - Year I

St Peter's 8:30am/7:00pm Masses - Tuesday, September 21, 2021

Ephesians 4:1-7,11-13 "I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called."

Psalm 19:1-4 "The heavens are telling the glory of God. Their message goes out through all the earth. "

Matthew 9:9-13 "Jesus was *walking* ... *saw* a man ... and *said*, "Follow me."

Calling All Disciples

Introduction

I think you probably know how significant a moment it is during the mass when, just before receiving Jesus in the Eucharist, we say: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed." Isn't it interesting that this particular idea of our 'worthiness' occurs just at that climactic moment of the mass? But then Jesus comes to us and enters into us at that moment. Why is that? Then, we receive him. So, are we worthy or not? Years ago, in a conversation about this moment in the mass, a woman said to me that she always changes the words to: "Lord, I am worthy that you should enter under my roof."

There is a lie, which I think is a favourite of the devil's, which says that we will always be unworthy, no matter what. This lie seeks to keep us imprisoned in a kind of self hatred from which there is no way out, even by the grace of God.

There is another very particular lie that is always alive and well in a culture like ours. That lie says that we make ourselves worthy. In the first lie, we make it impossible for God to help us overcome our unworthiness. In the second lie, we make it unnecessary for God to help us because we are already just fine, thank you.

Matthew

Worthiness is key issue in the account of Matthew's calling by Jesus. There are some key things for us to note here, as there always with Jesus. He never fails to surprise those around him, which should include us. First is that Jesus was walking along. Jesus is never just out for a stroll. Everything he does has purpose. He is not a man who would be playing video games to pass the time. Jesus is not only going somewhere purposeful. He is always acting in the name of the Father. He is always continuing the work of "making all things new." (Rev 21). It was true while he physically walked and it is still true today.

Second, Jesus saw Matthew working at a tax booth. Again, you can be sure that Jesus NEVER simply physically sees things going on. This word that Matthew himself uses means that Jesus was seeing from the heart of God, into the heart of men and women. In this case that heart was Matthew's. Third, Jesus calls Matthew. Once again, it's not a physical voice saying hey, why don't we hang out together. It's a profound invitation from the heart of God to the heart of a man.

What about Matthew. Did Jesus use 'The Force' to make Matthew come to him, or was he speaking into a longing that was already in his heart? Matthew lived with the perception from everyone that he was a sinner and a most unworthy and unredeemable man. Jesus knew Matthew was a sinner. Matthew knew he was a sinner. The Pharisees knew Matthew was a sinner. Tax collectors were sinners by definition. What the Pharisees and others around wondered was whether Jesus knew that Matthew was a sinner. The answer is, of course, a big yes. That's because we all are. But Jesus quotes Hosea, Chapter 6, to them. What God desires is mercy, not sacrifice. The mercy of God is for this exact situation, to call sinners, those who are spiritually sick.

And so Jesus 'calls' the tax collector. Matthew wasn't chosen for what he could do for Jesus. He was chosen for what he was willing to give up, to make himself a vessel for God's work in him. This is unlike the rich young man, who was a good man, a righteous man in every way, but who had no room in his heart for a calling. Remember, he went away sad because of his riches. It is possible Matthew hated his job. It is possible he was lonely because he had no friends among the

Romans, who hated the Jews. It is possible he was ready to give up his job out of loneliness because the Jews hated other Jews who worked for the Romans. Maybe he was lonely because the money he was collecting for himself was no longer enough. Matthew was likely already coming face to face with the longing deep in his heart for a life of meaning. I believe that's what Jesus 'saw' as he was walking along the road near Matthew's office.

Jesus does not call those who are already worthy. He makes us worthy. He calls each of us in our weakness and insignificance, to his love.

Ephesians

This is exactly what St. Paul says to the Ephesians. Everyone is called. He tells them to lead a life worthy of their calling. That means to walk with God, to be one with the Lord and with one another, in the Spirit.

Call To Action

Today our Call To Action is Paul's invitation to that unity and that calling. Matthew invited other tax collectors and sinners to meet Jesus. Almost immediately, he began to live out his new vocation. To be chosen means the Lord is calling us by name and saying: I appointed you to go and bear fruit, the fruit of love. We can trust, along with Matthew, that the Lord of all, who held nothing back from us, wants to give us everything, even himself. He has said so. He has made us, sinners though we are, worthy to receive blessing, satisfaction of the deepest longing of our hearts, the invitation to walk with him, to see like him, to love like him.

Key Scripture Passages Today

Entrance Antiphon: *Go and make disciples ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded.*

Collect: *O God, who were pleased to choose as an Apostle Saint Matthew, the tax collector, grant that we may merit to hold firm in following you.*

Ephesians: *I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gifts ... to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.*

Psalm: *The heavens are telling the glory of God.*

Matthew: *As Jesus was walking along he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth. And Jesus said to him, "Follow me." And Matthew got up and followed Jesus. And, as Jesus sat at dinner, the Pharisees said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But Jesus said, "those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick do. Go and learn what this means, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.*