

St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist 9/21/25
 Matthew 9:9-13
 "Following Jesus with St. Matthew"

GOSPEL LESSON, FROM THE 9TH CHAPTER OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

On the church year calendar, September 21st is the day for commemorating St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist, so today we remember St. Matthew.

Before we get to St. Matthew, let's take a minute and talk about why we remember and celebrate the lives of the saints. To be clear, **no**, we do not pray to them or seek their help in living a Christian life. But, we do honor them as examples of God's mercy – when we see Peter forgiven for his denial of Jesus, we are encouraged that grace does indeed abound more than sin, so we are comforted that God will forgive us. And, we also imitate their Christian virtues, especially their faith.

Which brings to St. Matthew. Who exactly was St. Matthew? Well, we refer to him as St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist. Each of those terms, apostle and evangelist, puts Matthew in pretty select company. St. Matthew is an apostle, and there were only twelve of them. The apostles received a direct call from Jesus and were eyewitnesses and ear witnesses to Him. Besides being one of the twelve apostles, St. Matthew also has the distinction of being one of the four evangelists, that is, the four gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Remember I said we honor saints so that we can learn from their faith and imitate their faith? We don't honor Matthew because he was a nice guy. No, we honor and learn from him because he pointed people to Jesus, as Lord and Savior. And, that means today, we learn how Matthew pointed to Jesus, so that we, too, can point people to Jesus. As we today

as we remember St. Matthew, our theme is: FOLLOWING JESUS WITH ST. MATTHEW. Today, we look at following Jesus with St. Matthew: in repentance; in faith; in service; and into everlasting life.

I. First, we follow Jesus with St. Matthew in **REPENTANCE**. Before he was a saint, Matthew was first a sinner. That's what repentance is about: being called by Jesus, as a sinner, to come and follow him and receive his mercy, grace, and forgiveness, so that we may be a saint, that is, a holy one, one of God's own children.

When we first meet Matthew, he was Levi, the tax collector. You know about tax collectors, right? They were Jews who worked with the Romans. So, they were seen by their fellow Jews as traitors, collaborators, since they were working for the hated Romans. And if that was not bad enough, tax collectors were wealthy, because they corrupt, crooked; they were outright thieves, who lined their own pockets at people's expense. Levi, being a tax collector, would have been looked down upon and not liked at all.

Remember, we said we honor the saints because they are examples of God's mercy for us? Who did Jesus call to be an Apostle and Evangelist? Not the most popular kid on the playground. But, a despised, hated tax collector. And yet Jesus calls him, "*Follow Me.*" And, his new name Matthew teaches us that he is a new creation in Christ.

That call, "Follow Me," is Jesus' call to all sinners. That means that is Jesus' call to you, because like Matthew, you are a sinner, and a sinner before you were a saint. You don't have to take my word for it. You yourself just confessed before heaven and earth, that you are by nature, sinful and unclean.

The Pharisees in our lesson didn't think they were sinners. Outwardly, in the eyes of the world, they perhaps did lead more respectable lives than tax collectors and other more blatant, open, obvious sinners. They were just better at hiding their sins – sins of pride, self-righteousness, a lack of mercy toward others. But those sins are not hidden from God. He sees. He knows. The truth is, we all, each one of us is a sinner and what does Jesus say? *"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners"* (v. 13). That's Matthew. That's you and me.

II. We follow Jesus with St. Matthew in **FAITH**. Christ calls us to follow Him, and the Good News for us poor sinners who are dead in sin is that that call of Christ carries with it the power to make it happen.

Maybe the best way to learn this is this way: Our parameters today are **red**. Red symbolizes the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. Because we cannot come to Jesus and faith is not something we do, God the Holy Spirit works faith in us through the hearing and learning of Christ's Word. Paul says it this way, *faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ (Ro 10:17)*. That's why when Christ called Matthew to follow Him, he rose and followed Jesus, because that word had created faith in the former tax collector. He sat at his Master's feet and learned from him. He heard the authority of the Savior's teaching. He saw the lame rise up and walk, and the wind and waves be stilled. He heard the Shepherd's parables and began to understand the secrets of the kingdom of God. Like the other disciples, the Holy Spirit created faith in them and kept them in the faith, and even brought them back when they fell away and were scattered.

And so we follow Jesus in faith, as Matthew did. In our Baptism, the Savior called to us, "Follow Me," – remember, Baptism is water "included in

God's command and combined with God's Word" -- and the Holy Spirit created faith in us so that we can follow the Master, hear His voice, and grow as His disciples.

III. Third, we follow Jesus with St. Matthew in **A LIFE OF SERVICE**.

Again, one of the reasons we remember and honor the saints is because it teaches us the great things God can achieve through human being. For Matthew, that was as an apostle and evangelist. Like Matthew, God is going to accomplish great things in you and through you. No, in the eyes of this perverse world, your works will not be thought wise, but – make no mistake about it – you will do **great** things serving your neighbor and glorify God in your service.

So I ask you: What are the areas of service God has for you? Where has God planted you? Are you a husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter? Each of these vocations has its own set of responsibilities. Are you an employee, a student, a butcher, a baker, a candlestick-maker? Well, then, be the best candlestick-maker you can be. Are you a citizen of this community, this state, this country? Then, you have civic responsibilities to carry out. Are you a church member? Then, how can you better serve in our church, supporting this congregation, speaking well of our church in the community, inviting your friends and neighbors to join you at worship? God has called you to these vocations, and He will give you all that you need to fulfill them, as you live a life of service, following Jesus, just as Matthew did.

IV. With Matthew, we follow Jesus in repentance, in faith, in service. And in one more way: Following Jesus, with St. Matthew, **INTO EVERLASTING LIFE**. *"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom" for you and me (Mt 20:28).* He served us by going the

way of the cross to atone for our sins, and ascended into heaven to open Paradise to us. And when we are harassed and helpless in the valley of the shadow of death, our Good Shepherd will have compassion on us, forgiving us, comforting us, guiding us, making us brave.

That's what our Shepherd is doing as we hear and learn His Word, as we take and eat His Body and drink His blood at His Holy Table, as He feeds the faith He began at our Baptism. Faith that trusts His promise, *"Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (28:20). And when he comes again, then we will follow Jesus on into the Kingdom of heaven, with St. Matthew, with all the saints, with all those redeemed by Christ and given the gift of everlasting life.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.