

**Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez for the
Feast of the Apostle and Evangelist
St. Matthew Catholic Church, Jacksonville
Saturday, Sept. 22, 2013**

I desire mercy.

There is an ancient prayer that gives us fresh insight into the Gospel we have heard as Matthew himself recalls his own personal conversion:

Through the abundance of your mercy, O our Savior, you appeared to sinners and tax collectors. Where else was your light to shine if not upon those who were sitting in darkness? Glory be to you!

- He saw a man named Matthew. He passed and he saw. He passed means the dynamism of Jesus' presence, the Savior cannot but be a savior, a healer of infirmities...
- Matthew was seen by Jesus. He saw Jesus as he was seeing him. His glance transmitted such an attraction, such a pull...it is as if Matthew realizes that Jesus pays attention to him. St. John in his first letter makes a point that we are **first** loved by God that is exactly what Matthew experienced.

One would think that Jesus would have chosen for his group of Apostles, the righteous, the studious of the law, the prayerful but his divine leadership looks beyond, it is magnanimous in generosity. And that is why Matthew who was a mess, exploiting his own people for the Romans, taking a slice of the pie for himself (Caravaggio paints him having money in his pockets), rises up in response to Jesus invitation: **Follow me**. Where else was his light to shine if not upon those who were sitting in darkness?

In recent days, Pope Francis gave an interview to *America*, a Jesuit magazine. He shared some very insightful and personal comments on the call to Matthew.

The first question he was asked: who is this Jorge Bergoglio who was elected pope. His answer: I am a sinner. First of all he stands with sinners like Matthew. That is why so many feel so close to Pope Francis. One feels that he is with us, people who have to pay bills, people who love children and like the company of others, people who make mistakes but are sorry for them.

In his own words, Pope Francis tells us also his reflection on tonight's Gospel:

“... the best summary, the one that comes more from the inside and I feel most true is this: I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon.” And he repeats: “I am one who is looked upon by the Lord. I always felt my motto, *Miserando atque Eligendo* [By Having Mercy and by Choosing Him], was very true for me.

The motto is taken from the homilies of Bede the Venerable, who writes in his comments on the Gospel story of the calling of Matthew: “Jesus saw a publican, and since he looked at him with feelings of love and chose him, he said to him, ‘Follow me.’” The pope adds: “I think the Latin *gerund miserando* is impossible to translate in both Italian and Spanish. I like to translate it with another gerund that does not exist: *misericiando* [“mercy-ing”]. See, Pope Francis has a deep connection with the story of Matthew’s vocation.

What a day this day was for Levi now called Matthew, Jesus passes, Jesus loves him, Jesus calls him and Jesus invites him to share a meal...

The proclamation of the Gospel, which is in fact the encounter with the person of Jesus, is like a Californian fire, that is: it is unstoppable, it spreads...and like the Samaritan woman who having found Jesus goes to the town of Sychar and brings the Lord to them, Matt, the new disciple brings his buddies who of course are a bit like him, “sinners,” men who are at the margins of the rituals and out of the sphere of the official religious leaders of Jerusalem. They come to the table to recline with Matthew and Jesus and his disciples. For the rest of his life Matthew will be an Apostle proposing to others the story of Jesus. Furthermore, he will have the unique privilege – along with three others – of being also an Evangelist, a Gospel writer for the Jewish community of his time.

To become Jesus’ disciple is not just to work for Jesus. Matthew could say I had worked for the Romans taking money from the people, collecting their taxes, now I work for Jesus but this time on behalf of the people. Yet it is better than that, a **disciple is called to share in friendship, an intimacy with Jesus in word and meal.** The way of the disciple is nourished by being with the Master, treasuring his words and partaking bread becoming one in mind and heart.

As your bishop, I have come tonight to celebrate your patron and to commend the faith community of St. Matthew, a community that is extremely generous and let me add extremely talented. You are loved by the Lord, and you have become his disciples and you share the Eucharistic banquet Sunday after Sunday and you witness this love by caring for the needy and witnessing the truth. You are so blessed to provide such quality Catholic education to your sons and daughters. The young are challenged and involved. You have recently rejuvenated your pastoral council under the guidance of Father Jose and your marvelous Deacons George Good and David Yazdiya. This story of your parish echoes the story of your patron who encountered merciful love and it all made a difference:

Through the abundance of your mercy, O our Savior, you appeared to sinners and tax collectors. Where else was your light to shine if not upon those who were sitting in darkness? Glory be to you!