

## FEAST OF ST MATTHEW

Reflection

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Texts: Eph 4:1-7;11-13 ... Matt 9:9-13

The Church presents us with quite challenging readings today. The call of Matthew the tax collector is also in the Gospel of Mark and Luke with similar wording. Matthew's author, however, adds a few details. He changes the name from *Levi* to *Matthew* and also adds the sentence: 'Go and learn the meaning of the words, *I desire mercy, not sacrifice*,' a reference to Hosea 6:6.

Tax collectors were Jews who were hated by strictly ritual practicing Jews but also tolerated by other Jews for the sake of keeping peace with Roman occupation because at least the Romans allowed the Jews to practice their faith. Tax collectors were also suspected of fraud because they often charged more than the tax laws allowed. They pocketed the remainder and thus became richer than most ordinary Jews. Jesus eating a meal with these crooks was the epitome of infidelity to Jewish law. No wonder some of the Pharisees and Scribes condemned him for not being a faithful Jew.

Matthew had the means and put on a great meal for Jesus and his other guests, tax collectors and people were excluded because they were unclean, according to rigorous Jewish law. Jesus did not hesitate even one second, saying to the strict Pharisee's question that he has come to heal, to reconcile, and that all those who have been declared ritually impure are to be included at the table of love. I imagine that he really enjoyed himself as he did at the wedding feast of Cana with the friends of his mom.

Equally important is the author of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. Paul and his companions had indeed founded many small churches in the Gentile world of the Mediterranean Sea. Some New Testament scholars believe that this was a kind of circular or encyclical letter that was sent, not only to the Ephesians, but also to several churches who were now growing and perhaps developing dissensions about who was to be included in the church community. This "encyclical" is written with a summary of Paul's earlier teachings on the church.

"Live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with *all* humility and gentleness, with patience, *bearing* with one another through love, *striving* to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace: *one Body* and *one Spirit*, as you also were called to the *one hope* of your call; *one Lord, one faith, one baptism*; one God and Father of all, who is *over all and through all and in all*."

The "encyclical" goes on to say that the members of the church have all been graced with specific gifts to build up the Body of Christ constantly and continuously: apostles, evangelists, prophets, pastors, administrators, and teachers.

All of us here in our IHM family have been teachers and administrators and pastors and healers, and in many ways those of us who are “retired continue to do so at our own pace. And so, what a wonderful challenge we have this morning: to work *joyfully and constantly and continuously*, changing ourselves by confronting our white privilege to overcome our racist attitudes; to *work joyfully and constantly and continuously* for change in our church to be more inclusive of divorced and remarried and of LGBTQ+ persons, so that all can be welcomed at the table of love.

Let's embrace our call, like Jesus and Mathew the evangelist and Matthew the tax collector and Paul, to “live joyfully and humbly and with mercy.” To paraphrase another God-given graced teaching from Abraham Lincoln's address after the Civil War, let us live now with no ill toward anyone and kindness toward everyone. God's life in our church in the USA and in so many other nations of the world still need “building up.” God's life in political and economic and social civic societies all over our earth still need prayer and action for realized social justice.

*Let us live this call joyfully and constantly and continuously!*