

Homily -

Matthew was a traitor to his people. He was a Galilean, resident in Capernaum, a Jew by birth. From his other name, Levi, it is thought by many that he may have been of that tribe, the tribe from which the priesthood was taken, whose members, even if not priests, had specific privileges and duties in the worship of God in the Temple. If so, he could have been there, devout and respected, honored by both God and men. But NO., Matthew chose to reject his heritage, and thus to reject his God. He chose the route of wealth and privilege, by allying himself with the hated Roman invaders, and taking up the job of a tax collector, or "publican" as the King James Bible translates it, for the occupying power. Oh yes, he became wealthy. He became powerful, having the power to have men put in prison, able to reduce citizens to beggary, feared, yes, but despised. He had the grudging respect of the Roman overlords, but his own people rejected him entirely, and loathed him more than the criminals and the other unsavory people of the underworld.

We hear nothing at all about his family. This is probably because they had rejected him, and possibly even had a funeral for him, declaring him dead. This Matthew was at the office, receiving the taxes the people paid unwillingly, and extorting more from them for his livelihood. Those walking by, unless they had to do business with him, averted their heads and refused even to look at him, and some of them, as soon as they were safely out of sight, would spit on the ground in disgust. He was sitting there at his bench, when the notorious preacher Jesus of Nazareth walked by with a group of His followers. He looked the despised traitor straight in the eye, and said, "Follow me." And Matthew, probably to his own surprise, did. Later, he threw a party at his own house, probably a goodbye party to all his friends, as he was going to follow the Master in His wanderings. And who were his friends? Publicans, in other words, more traitors, and sinners, the dregs of the city, those who deliberately broke the laws of Moses, made their living in unacceptable ways, and lived lives which shocked the religious people. They were there -- and so was Jesus -- and the fine, upstanding religious leaders, were shocked and scandalized.

"But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." -----

Focus your eyes on the cross for a moment. <<>> Why was He there? Who was He dying for? Was it for the good, respectable people? Or was it because there aren't any? "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." The respectable no less than the obvious and despised sinners. The Pharisees were right that Matthew did not deserve God's favor, but they were so very wrong to think that they did. He died for sinners. It was for sinners that He came into the world. It was sinners that he called and taught. It was for sinners that he hung on that Cross. His rising was for sinners. His intercession is for sinners. Holy Church, her sacraments and fellowship, and the Holy Scriptures themselves, are His gift to sinners.

Did you hear what Jeremiah said? He was speaking to a nation which had badly failed God, and which was surely about to have a difficult time because of that. These were people whom he had loudly condemned for their sins, to whom he had promised judgment, but yet, even they were not rejected. "The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, " he said, "saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. " Matthew deserved to be scorned, but Jesus did not scorn him. neither is it permitted that we do so. We are sinners, all of us. We are not better than those we want to despise. He loved and loves them, and so must we. Matthew, the despised traitor, became one of the twelve apostles on whom Jesus built His Church. He was one of the four called to write the Gospels. He carried the Gospel to unbelievers, and died for the faith of Christ. The despicable one became a saint, and so can we.

God so lead us and help us, in this mortal life, and in the eternal ages to come, through Christ our Lord.
Amen.