

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
 St Matthew
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 rmcneely+

Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?

Today the Church directs our attention to the life of Saint Matthew.

There are unrecorded things we don't know about Matthew:

When he was born,
 His early education and training,
 Whether he have a wife and children.
 We don't know with precision and verifiable evidence
 When or where he died.

However, let's not let what we don't know
 temper what we do know about him, his life and example.

We know from scripture that Matthew was also known as Levi in
 the other Gospels.

"Matthew" seems to be a Christian name
 or nick name.

Scripture tells us he was the son of Alphaeus and Mary.
 And that Jesus also called his brother James as an Apostle
 Who became the all-important Bishop of Jerusalem.

We know from today's Gospel in his own words
 That when Jesus called him to be an Apostle
 Matthew was a publican in Capernaum,
 That fishing village where the Jordan poured into
 The Sea of Galilee that Jesus used as something of a base.

Now, let's pause for a moment and consider what we can infer
 From what we know from scripture.

Obviously Matthew was a Jew living in Capernaum.
When he encountered Jesus,
 He was working as a tax collector.
He held an office appointed by the Roman occupiers.
 He worked for Herod Antipas.

He was among the despised and scorned Jews who extracted taxes
From the Jews and paid them over to the Romans.
Collecting more than was owed
 and keeping some for himself.
 Many in his position became wealthy
 on their ill gotten gains.
Certainly Matthew had prospered enough to own the home
 That was sufficient to host the dinner for Jesus
And many other publicans and sinners
 recorded in his Gospel.
The table fare included “meat”,
 An expensive luxury in the day.

In the eyes of his countrymen
 Matthew was a traitor,
 A thief, a cheat,
 And the lowest of society.

The scorn of the Pharisees from today’s Gospel
 In Matthews own hand,
 Accurately expressed the tenor of the times.

The Pharisees speak for us when they ask;
 “Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?”
 Let’s leave that question unanswered for a moment.

In order to perform his duties as a publican
 Matthew had to have above average education and training.
 and was skilled at record keeping and writing.

Based upon the content of his Gospel writing,
 some speculate that Matthew
 Was trained by the Pharisees or at least was well acquainted
 With their doctrine.

From the timing of his account, we can infer
 That Matthew lived most of his life as a contemporary
 Of Jesus
 In the first century AD.

There can be no question but that Jesus selected Matthew as an
 Apostle,
 And that Matthew immediately stood
 And followed Jesus for the next three years.
 Abandoning his lucrative post and income.
 Immediately.

An interesting choice for the Son of God to be among the 12:

One of only 12 men that Jesus knew
 He would have to depend upon
 to establish the church after His ascension.
 One of the 12 men who Jesus knew would
 have to lead the church through its darkest of days.
 One of the 12 men who Jesus knew would
 preach the new Christian ethic
 about loving your neighbor as yourself.
 One of the 12 who Jesus knew would
 face martyrdom for the church.

And Jesus chose this, hated, traitorous, corrupt man to be one of the 12.

We know from scripture that Matthew was present at all the critical
 events in Jesus' earthly ministry.

He was there and recorded for us the contents of the Sermon on the Mount

in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of his Gospel.

It is from Matthew that we receive the Lord's Prayer.

Matthew was one of two eyewitnesses among the Gospelers.

Reading Matthew's first hand account of the life of Jesus is re-assuring.

It is from Matthew we get the Passion.

His retelling of

the Last Supper,

the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane

the betrayal and arrest

the trial

the crucifixion

the burial

the resurrection

Matthew's style of writing brings all the emotion,

pain and the agony,

vividly to life and

lets us almost feel as though we are standing beside him.

There was a time, in the not too distant past,

When people knew all about the Saints.

Parents taught their children the stories of the lives of the Saints.

The Saints were examples to be emulated

And were the inspiration for our lives.

That seems to be all gone now

With the comic book figures of super heroes

And super powers taking their place

In the imagination of our kids and grand kids.

Let's return to the question that the Pharisees asked;

"Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners"?

A recent Pope gave this question a good deal of thought and put it this way:

“in the figure of Matthew, the Gospels present to us
a true and proper paradox:

those who seem to be the farthest from Holiness
can even become a model
of the acceptance of God’s mercy
and offer a glimpse of those marvelous efforts
in our own lives.”

So if Jesus selected a man from among the most hated and despised
people he could find,

And put the future of the Church in that man’s hands,
What is he saying about you
You and me?

Are there any of us beyond His redemption?

Any of us

No matter what our failings
That He cannot save from the evil in our lives?

Jesus ate with publicans and sinners in the house of Matthew,

Not because he was one of them, a grave sinner,

But because He bore the Love of God;

Because He was incarnate to save mankind from itself.

Matthew, like Paul, spent his early life in despicable ways.

But after his journey with Christ,

He became a model of the acceptance of God’s mercy,

He traveled through the Caucasuses, modern day Armenia,

Georgia and into Persia,

modern day Iran.

Preaching the Gospel, spreading the Word.

He was a walking miracle.

Evidence of the power of God's redemption.

In the second century, the early patriarchs of the Church
wrote that Matthew made it all the way to Ethiopia,
where he was martyred.

Matthew inspires us still.

A paradox, yes.

But an example of a holy man

who

After a sinful beginning,

lived the remainder of his life

In the service of God.

His life gives us hope

That our sinful past is overcome by the love of God

And that we too

May see the Kingdom of God in paradise.

