



Matthew 9 : 9-13

9 As Jesus was walking on he saw a man named Matthew sitting by the customs house, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him.

10 While he was at dinner in the house it happened that a number of tax collectors and sinners came to sit at the table with Jesus and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?' 12 When he heard this he replied, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. 13 Go and learn the meaning of the words: What I want is mercy, not sacrifice. And indeed I did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners.'

Other readings: Hosea 6:3-6 Psalm 49 (50) Romans 4:18-25

After the Sermon on the Mount, the great discourse of Jesus at the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew, the evangelist records a series of miracles of Jesus. We then hear of the call of Matthew. It takes the classic form found in all the Synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew and Luke). The words 'Follow me!' invoke an immediate response from the disciple. But this time the occupation of the man who is called is the disreputable one of tax-collector. Tax-collectors colluded with oppressive rule and were often corrupt. For these reasons they were despised by the people.

The tax-collector Matthew, called Levi in the other gospels, is an unlikely choice to be a disciple. Not surprisingly, the gospel continues with reference to Jesus in the company of 'tax-collectors and sinners'. The story reaches a climax with the complaints of the Pharisees about Jesus sharing a meal with them.

The response of Jesus begins with what may be a proverb, that the sick, not the healthy, need a doctor. He then quotes a line from the prophet Hosea, taken from the passage which is in fact our first reading. The prophet invited people to show love as the first priority, before any concern for ritual sacrifices. The 'love' in the passage from Hosea embraces also the concept of 'mercy' in our gospel passage. Jesus comes to call sinners.

We also have quite an extensive reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans, which concerns the faith of Abraham. St Paul uses the example of Abraham to illustrate that salvation comes from faith, and not from doing good deeds. This topic has been much debated among Christians for centuries. We are saved by faith in the saving work of Christ, and not by any achievements of our own. Faith must then be lived out in works of love. What God asks of us is love and mercy.

Am I ready to leave everything as Matthew did to follow the call of Christ?

Do I feel unworthy to be involved in the things of God? What can I do about it?

Let us pray for those who cannot accept a God of love and mercy.

Let us pray for those who are considering a call to the priesthood or to the religious life.