

ST. MATTHEW, SHEPHERD OF GOD'S PEOPLE

As Jesus was passing by, HE SAW A MAN NAMED MATTHEW SITTING BY THE CUSTOMS HOUSE AND SAID TO HIM 'FOLLOW ME' AND HE GOT UP AND FOLLOWED HIM. In a recent interview, Pope Francis revealed his favourite painting. If you've been to Rome, it's in the French Church; it's Caravaggio's famous 'Call of St. Matthew' in which a beam of light illuminates a gloomy room while Matthew points to himself as if to ask: WHAT, ME? Pope Francis was asked: Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio? To which he replied: "A sinner. I am a sinner." He then added: "That finger of Jesus, pointing at Matthew: that's me. I feel like him, like Matthew. That's me, a sinner, on whom the Lord has turned his gaze."

We keep today the feast of St. Matthew, whose vocation we hear about in the Gospel: a tax collector, a Jew despised for helping the Romans, called suddenly as Christ passed by, FOLLOW ME, and we're told, immediately HE GOT UP AND FOLLOWED HIM. Just as for Matthew and for Pope Francis, so too for you and me, the Lord has passed by and called us into his service, each in our own way, enriching us with gifts and talents. As St. Paul put it in the 1stR: TO SOME, HIS GIFT WAS THEY SHOULD BE APOSTLES, TO SOME PROPHETS, TO SOME EVANGELISTS, TO SOME PASTORS AND TEACHERS, SO THAT TOGETHER THE SAINTS MAKE A UNITY IN THE WORK OF SERVICE, BUILDING UP THE BODY OF CHRIST. Jesus called Matthew to be an apostle, one of the Twelve, a teacher, high priest and shepherd, and the role of 'apostle', like that of their successors the bishops, is not easy. Indeed, Matthew ended his days in Ethiopia, where as a martyr he laid down his life for the Lord.

WHAT I WANT IS MERCY NOT SACRIFICE. INDEED, I DID NOT COME TO CALL THE VIRTUOUS BUT SINNERS. It's so appropriate it's today, the Feast of St. Matthew, that we offer Holy Mass for God's blessing upon our Tribunal. We offer this Mass for you and for your intentions, and we thank God for the grace, mercy and happiness the Church in our diocese, through the work of the Tribunal, is able to bring to those whose marriages have broken down. We thank God for Canon Dominic, for his many years of service as Judicial Vicar, and also for Fr. Simon who so generously is taking over. We also pray for Dani Marsden and for all of you auditors and helpers who work so hard to bring Christ's healing to those who so badly need it. Like St. Matthew, like Pope Francis, like every member of the Church, we exclaim 'What, me Lord? I am a sinner.' We don't look for praise, but for prayer, that what we do may accord with God's will. Yet on behalf of the Lord, as your bishop, I thank you profoundly for all you do, for your generous response to the call of Christ, and for all your time, travel, listening and hard work.

Next Sunday, I'm going to issue a Pastoral Letter about the renewal of our Diocese of Portsmouth as we focus our energies on the work of new evangelisation. Every single one of us has been called by Christ and enriched to serve the needs of the poor. He is our Master and we are his disciples. Over the coming months, we hope to put in place processes that will identify and release the gifts God has given us. So in this Mass today, as Christ passes by, let's ask the prayers of St. Matthew. Pray for God's blessing upon our diocese, upon the work of the Tribunal and upon all those whom, through it, we serve. Indeed, let us pray for those called to marriage and family life, and, remembering that the Heart of Jesus is patient and most merciful, let us pray for God's blessing upon the work ahead.