

Chapel Address

For St. Matthew The Apostle and The Evangelist's Day

HARRY HUTCH

"Jesus . . . saw a man named Matthew." *Matt.* 9:9.

OUR LORD was in the process of choosing, from among those who had been with Him from the beginning, the twelve Apostles,—those blessed ones who (with the exception of Judas, of course) would become the foundation stones and pillars of His Church, the New Testament Israel.

One day, as He was leaving Capernaum, He saw a man named Matthew, and called him to be numbered among the privileged Twelve.

He saw a *man* (for me this has always had profound significance!)—a *mere man* for the high and holy office of an apostle of God! Yes, it was men,—ordinary men, whom our Lord chose to continue that work with which an angelic host was charged when the Savior first came, the work of proclaiming that *He* had come Who is the hope of Israel and the Light of the Gentiles. In the secret counsels of His wisdom it has pleased God to use such feeble instruments for the great work of the ministry; instruments who, in keen awareness of their own inadequacies, often must say with the apostle Paul: "I am nothing": instruments whose very limitations, however, magnify the grace of God that called them, and make it the more obvious that whatever is accomplished through their ministry must be ascribed completely to the mighty work of the Holy Spirit.

Men, ordinary men, such as we are, whom He sees here and there (often before others or even we ourselves ever entertained the thought of such a possibility)—such mere men He still in His own way leads and calls into the glorious work of the ministry—men who know their frailties, but are certain that the Spirit of God can and does, where and when it pleases Him, perform through them more than they are able even to ask or think.

If ever some day, amidst the magnitude of the responsibilities, the complexity of the problems, the challenge of seemingly unending opportunities, and the other pressing demands of your sacred office in the twentieth century, an overwhelming sense of your human shortcomings should cause you to become despondent and discouraged, then take heart and know that in *you* Jesus, who was fully aware of your inadequacies, saw a man whom He in His marvelous grace could use effectually as His ambassador to our age. Take courage from the wonderful assurance that Paul offers all his successors in the office of the ministry when he acknowledges on the

one hand that we are not sufficient even to think anything of ourselves, but expresses the conviction on the other hand that he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him, and that God did indeed work mightily through him among the Gentiles as He did through Peter among the Jews.

Jesus saw a specific man, a specific individual, the value of whose personal peculiarities for service in God's kingdom might go unnoticed by others, but not by Him who in the fullest sense of the word knows what is in man for He knows all men. Jesus, who created Matthew, and had come to redeem and sanctify Matthew,—He saw much more in Matthew than the kind of factors which can be measured by a battery of tests and processed by an IBM machine. To Jesus, Matthew was more than merely another instance of some "type" or other, whose usefulness could be judged mainly in terms of conformity to patterns and whose potential could be calculated mechanically without taking into really serious account what the enabling power of God's Spirit can do through the most unlikely prospects for success in the ministry,—especially if these prospects are evaluated or computed solely according to secular, earthly standards.

Jesus saw a man who not only had those natural aptitudes and gifts which according to the Scriptures themselves are necessary for a servant of the Word, but whose makeup and endowments constituted him, Matthew, as distinct from Paul and Peter and others, and which rendered him peculiarly apt for the work which God intended him to do; especially, He saw a man who, as a "new creation in Christ," would have capacities for work in the vineyard of the Lord were no more subject to prior computation than is the power of the Spirit of God Himself, who has promised His abiding presence and perpetual aid to all whom He calls for service.

Who, for instance, by any testing device ever devised could have predicted that cringing little company of disciples hiding behind locked doors in Jerusalem for fear of the Jews would become, after the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, by their bold witness to the Savior, a force that turned the world upside down? Who, but God only, can predict what He, in His marvelous counsels, has determined to accomplish through you—man, mere man that you are?

Jesus saw a man "*named*" Matthew,—in effect, re-named Matthew.

This man was formerly named Levi, and by this name he was known as "the publican." A collector of revenue for the Roman government on all exports and imports that passed along the trade route between Damascus and Phoenicia, he was to his fellow Jews the object of contempt as a collaborator with the enemy, as we would call such a man in our day; the object of hate because of the greed and extortion for which publicans were notoriously infamous; the object of mingled wrath and pity because, having forgotten

Israel's spiritual mission in the world, he had become a worldly opportunist who knew how to turn a situation to his own carnal advantage. A wretched man was this man named Levi.

Then Christ came into his life with an invitation to discipleship that carried with it the power to tear this man loose from his past, and break the chains of evil and the grip of death that held him, and to give him, together with a new name, which is written in the Book of Life, also a new nature and a new future of devoted service to his Lord and to his fellowmen. Not Levi is remembered today, but Matthew, disciple and servant of Jesus,—and as long as the earth stands, and there are people who read and love the Gospels, there will be people who remember Matthew for leaving all and following Christ, and for recording His sayings, and for showing how Jesus was the One for whom Israel waited, and for reporting all that Jesus did and suffered for our salvation.

Where were *you* sitting when Jesus passed by and saw *you*? Wherever it was, He *re-named you*, too,—gave you a new identity and a new future. Formerly you were known as "business man", "engineer", or by the name of some other vocation with which you had become identified by choice and training;—but from now on you will be known as one of that great and noble company of men who, by God's grace, forsook all, so that unentangled in earthly affairs, they could give to the Savior and His Church a life-time of dedicated service. And in doing this, by following Matthew's example, you have paid the highest tribute to his memory that anyone could ever pay.

Jesus saw a man named "*Matthew*."

The name Matthew means "gift of God", and indeed that is precisely what the man who bore this name was. He was an apostle, and only God could bestow such a gift upon mankind. There could be an apostle, in the New Testament sense of that term, only because God in His infinite mercy sent His Son to redeem sinners, and by the power of His Spirit called men to faith in their Savior, and then commissioned them to bear the glad tidings of His pardoning grace to a perishing world. Truly, men like Matthew are gifts of God for which Christians should never cease to be thankful, and it is altogether in keeping with the Biblical admonition to remember them who have spoken unto us the Word of God, that the Church should on this day celebrate the blessings that our Lord has bestowed upon us through His holy apostle, Matthew.

But while we are remembering today one of the Church's teachers in days gone by (because we recognize men like Matthew to be truly what that name signifies) we ought not to forget that Paul says that all pastors and teachers are gifts of God to His Church.

You are "Matthews"—each one of you is a precious gift from the Lord of the Church. It was God who bought you with His own blood, it was God who called you by the Gospel, it was God who begot you again and made you His children through faith, it

was God who directed you here to prepare for the ministry. Your joy in the holy office for which you are preparing will depend to a great degree on how firmly you keep on believing that; believing that frailties and limitations notwithstanding, you are a gift of God to His Church whom He will make a blessing to many.

If your enduring joy in the ministry will depend to a great degree on how well you remember that you are a gift of God to His Church, so will your diligence and faithfulness depend largely on this. You are a gift. You no longer belong to yourself. You have been given away! First, you gave yourself to your Savior, and now He has given you to His Bride. You have been given away into a holy bondage,—bondage to Him who freed you from sin and death, and bondage to all whom He has redeemed. May the knowledge that you are bondservants of the Lord and His Church keep you from ever living to yourself!

In memory of the man named Matthew, to the honor of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ, and for the extension of His kingdom from the rising of the sun to the setting thereof, let us this day, responding to the call of our Lord, rise up anew and follow Him! Amen.