

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Sep 21st 2013

A whole month of reflections could be written on the first reading alone. It is one of those Pauline passages that is chocked full of important teaching. We are to live in a manner worthy of our call. We are to do so with humility, gentleness, and patience. We are to bear with one another through love and strive to preserve Christian unity.

Then he presents the Ones: one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Whew! Chew on that for a month. At the end of the passage Paul presents a key teaching about ministry. All of us are called to ministry. All of us are given the grace needed to do it. The laity cannot look to the clerics and say, "It is up to you to do the ministry of the Church." That is not the role of a cleric.

Their role is "to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building the Body of Christ..." The work of ministry is the work of the laity. Of course, if you think of "ministry" as mostly doing things around the church building, then Paul's point will not make sense. However, the new evangelization, the re-conversion of the culture, can only be done by the school teachers, lawyers, nurses, medical doctors, firemen, housewives, students, in essence, the laity.

We can certainly use more priests, deacons, and religious but we mostly need lay people who are fully alive and reaching out with the Good News of Jesus to the four corners of the earth, beginning with their own living rooms, job sites, and city streets. Saint Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist, whose feast we celebrate today, took the teaching of Saint Paul to heart, whether or not he ever met the man. He proclaimed the Good News of Jesus. In the words of the psalm response, his message went out through all the earth. In doing this, he helped equip his hearers to take the story of Jesus to their world.

Actually, we do not know much about Matthew's ministry, although we do have a little written piece he left behind! That has been building up the holy ones for the work of ministry for close to two-thousand years now. Each person has gifts. Each person receives the grace necessary to use those gifts. Let us be glad that Matthew used his. It did not start out that way.

Matthew was a tax collector, a dreaded collaborator with the occupying Roman army. But Jesus called him and Matthew followed. Matthew was sick, a sinner, and needed a physician. Jesus had the necessary medicine: mercy. I am glad that Jesus did not listen to the Pharisees who were too pure to reach out to Matthew. The Church, the world, would be worse off for it.

I am reminded of Matthew every time I meet someone who is obviously not interested in the saving power of Jesus Christ. I can always tell this by how they live. Then Matthew comes to mind, my Pharisaical attitude gets rebuked, and I think, "There may be the next great evangelist in the Church of Jesus Christ." "Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'" That is not an easy lesson to learn. St. Matthew, pray for us.

George Butterfield