

St. Vincent Ferrer, O.P. – Sermon on the Call of Matthew (Mt 9:9-13)

9 And when Jesus passed on from hence, he saw a man sitting in the custom house, named Matthew; and he saith to him: Follow me. And he rose up and followed him.

10 And it came to pass as he was sitting at meat in the house, behold many publicans and sinners came, and sat down with Jesus and his disciples.

11 And the Pharisees seeing it, said to his disciples: Why doth your master eat with publicans and sinners?

12 But Jesus hearing it, said: They that are in health need not a physician, but they that are ill.

13 Go then and learn what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice. For I am not come to call the just, but sinners.

"For I am not come to call the just, but sinners," (Mt 9:13)/

The official Gospel reading is this. Today's feast is great, if you wish to consider the person, because he is the first apostle and evangelist and glorious martyr, because about the apostle per se there is a feast, and about the evangelist per se, and of the martyr per se, therefore there are three reasons which come together to make this a great feast. Our sermon shall be about it. Let the Virgin Mary be hailed.

The proposed text is that of our Lord Jesus Christ saying, "For I am not come," etc. At first glance already you can see that this text has a problem, for Christ who loved both the just and the unjust, as well as the wicked and sinners, said, "For I am not come," etc. So a clarification is necessary, and so we shall enter the matter to be preached by declaring. Now listen. Such a difference I find between the just person and the sinner, just as between being near or close to God, and distant from God. The just man, good and god-fearing is so near to God that no creature is closer to him, neither his coat nor shirt nor skin is closer than God. And with respect to the understanding, because just as air at noon is near to light because it is entirely illuminated by the sun, so God is near to the intellect of the just and good, by enlightenment [per illustrationem], by illuminating the spirit, because the whole is filled with divinity, nor does he leave there the darkness of error, neither bonfire [usturam] of false opinions, to this extent, that not only are the just said to be luminous, but also to be light. "For you were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord," (Eph 5:8). Also Mat 5: "You are the light of the world," (Mt 5:14).

Also he is near to the will through charitable love, because just as you see fire around red hot iron, so the will of the just is inflamed by divinity for loving God above all things and your neighbor like yourself. "God is love: and he who abides in love, abides in God, and God in him," (1 Jn 4:16).

Also God is near the just man with respect to life through honesty, and conversation, because just as a colored cloth is near to the coat or color, so the just person is tinted or colored with sanctity before God, with humble eyes, in ears hearing the things of God, in extending hands, in prayer, in the throat, through temperance in the body, by afflicting it, in memory of the passion of Christ. It is clear that the person is colored. etc. "You, O

Lord, are among us, and your name is called upon by us," (Jer 14:9). Behold how a just person is near to God. So David says, "The Lord is near to all who call upon him: to all who call upon him in truth," (Ps 144:18).

But the unjust person, the sinner, is far from God, not by a physical [locali] distance, because if so, the person would immediately be annihilated, but he is said to be distanced from a sinner by a formal difference, because just as it is said of two pieces of cloth, although joined, if one be fine and the other rough, they are said to be distanced, not locally but formally. So it is of God and the sinner, because there is such a difference between so great a holiness and so great an iniquity. Therefore David in Ps 118:155, "Salvation," Jesus, "is far from sinners; because they have not sought your justifications," that is your holiness [sanctitates]. It is clear therefore how the just are near to God, and sinners distanced from God.

Now it is clear that one who is near is not called, but he who is at a distance is called. This is what Christ was saying, "For I am not come to call the just." Reason, because already they are with him, although he shall come to save them, if they persevere, but sinners, that they be converted. The theme is clear.

This theme is generally appropriated to St. Matthew, apostle etc. I find that St. Matthew the evangelist, before his conversion was far from God, because he was unjust and a great sinner. Therefore he was called by God saying, "Come, follow me," (Mt 19:21). About this calling [vocationem] of St. Matthew four things must be said.

- First, his gracious calling [vocatio gratiosa],
- Second, the fruitful invitation [invitatio fructuosa],
- Third, the virtuous action [operatio virtuosa],
- Fourth, his glorious perfection [perfectio gloriosa].

GRACIOUS CALLING

As to the first, the manner of his conversion and calling was gracious. I have sought out how many jobs [officia] St. Matthew had, and I found that he had three bad jobs in this world, namely a dangerous job, a criminal job and a loathsome job.

The dangerous job is that of money lender, which he had. For in the city of Capharnum which is on the lake, he kept the accounts, the money changer's table. The job is dangerous to the soul to handle so much money, because just as someone who handles oil, coal or fish is dirtied by them, so the one who handles money. And because of this the Scripture says, "He who touches pitch, shall be defiled with it," (Sir 13:1). Money is called "pitch." Reason, because it leaves lots of stains on souls of those handling money. First in their thoughts, and second in time wasted, occupied in negotiations. As a sign of this, coins, whether gold, or silver, then it is handled it leaves great stains on the hands of a man, because the reason is, that money lenders perpetrate frauds etc.

Second it is criminal, because it is usurious. So Bede says that after his conversion he distributed his property, because he used to seize things by usury. It is said that he used to lend ten for twelve, and so for the other kinds of usury, according to which it is

required for profit to buy for less and sell for more,. Also by receiving profits by lending for collateral [super possessiones]. There are many who act in this way, and they excuse themselves saying, falsely, that the church permits it etc. This is contrary to the divine ordination, which would have it that all creatures freely distribute and share those things which God has shared with them. This is clear of the sun, which distributes light shared with it from God against darkness, and heat against cold, and its power to ripen. Same for fire which communicates its brightness and warmth. Same of the air for breathing, and water for washing, and catching fish, the earth for plants etc. So therefore since the irrational creatures share, how much more should we? Therefore there is a great sin in usury. This is the criminal job. But he who lends freely and without usury, is just, as the prophet says, "A man ...who has not lent upon usury...is just," (Ez 18:8,9).

The third job was loathsome [odiosum] and disgusting, because he was the tax-collector in the city of Capharnum, collecting by law of the Emperor. Therefore he is called a tax-collector, that is a publican, because he held the public office of tax-collector. This office is disgusting and loathsome, because sometimes he effects great injuries, from the authority which he has. Because of this reason, John the Baptist, to whom the publicans came asking "What shall we do that we may be saved?" replied, "Do nothing more than that which is appointed you," (Cf Lk 3:12). From these three jobs St. Matthew was distanced from God by three great distances [diestas ?].

But listen to how he was called – He was the sixth [apostle], because he [Christ] already had called five others – when Christ walked along the sea of Galilee, and St. Matthew was sitting at the counting table, at his great house by the lakeshore, taking care of his business, to be specific, about the business of collecting and changing money. Christ stood and looked at the publican, Levi by name, involved in his business, etc., who was unable to think either about God or about his soul. And Christ looked at him, that is regarded him attentively [attente respexit]. And St. Matthew, by the ordination of God, raising his eyes saw Christ before him, whom he did not know. But so great was the reverence and majesty of his sanctity, that Matthew gazed at him in admiration. Christ said to him, "Come and follow me." Immediately by divine power, the moment Christ pronounced these words, the ray of brightness illuminated his mind, and he recognized Christ to be the true Messiah, and his heart out of contrition for sins was saying, "Here am I: for you did call me," (1 Kg 3:9). Immediately, leaving everything, he followed him, walking away from his books and accounts etc. Reason says that he said to Christ, "Lord, I give you thanks, you have selected me as a disciple," etc. You can well believe that Christ said, "Go settle your business. Return an account and a tally to your superiors, and arrange a settlement [diffinitionem], and take back what you have lent out, without usury. Receive back only the principle. Believe it. That is what he did, announce publicly if he was contracted with anyone in any way whatsoever through usury, or injustice, that he would give satisfaction for all. This is the way of satisfying for public usury, otherwise for what is secret, restitution ought to be made secretly. Whoever wishes to enter into paradise should act in this way. The sin is not forgiven, unless the restitution is accomplished. It is the rule of jurists, *14, q.6 Si res.* and of the theologians. Do not be deceived saying, "I shall put it in a will, etc." This is said against those who say, "If I make restitution, I would have to come down in class. The same about the son's

inheritance etc. Therefore it is necessary to keep monies like an apple or pomegranate [mala granata], that you examine it lest it be spotted or spoiled etc. So should you yourself do when you receive florins or other goods. You should examine it saying to yourself, "Let us see whether this has the worms of usury, or the stains of theft, and should be thrown out by making restitution, otherwise it corrupts another and another," etc. Have no doubt about it, you will lack for nothing. So David says, "I have been young, and now am old; and I have not seen the just forsaken, nor his seed seeking bread," (Ps 36:5). But of the usurer the same David says, "I have seen the wicked highly exalted, and lifted up like the cedars of Lebanon. And I passed by, and lo, he was not : and I sought him and his place was not found," (Ps 36:35-36).

FRUITFUL INVITATION

As for the second, namely the fruitful invitation. It is said how after he restored all, he remained at home and with some money from a just man, he wished to host a great dinner for Christ, so that he might do as religious do when they enter an order, etc. Of this banquet we read in Luke 5, "And Levi made him a great feast in his own house," (Lk 5:29). St. Matthew's name was Levi. The details of this banquet is told in the text of Luke 5, "And there was a great company of publicans, and of others, that were at table with them," (v. 29). The intention of St. Matthew was that these also be converted. This reason St. Jerome states. St. Matthew was thinking, "If he converted me who was so wrapped up in business, he can also convert these." It is told how it was arranged by Christ that the gates would be open and the apostles would sit near the doors, and Christ amidst the publicans said the verse, "The eyes of all," (Cf Ps 144:15, the friars' prayer before meals), and he sat himself down at the table with them. Then was fulfilled the prophecy, Can. 2:3: "As the *malus*," that is the apple, "is among the trees of the woods," namely without fruit, "so my beloved among the sons." And during the pause between courses [inter cibum et cibum], as happens in great feasts, Christ in the manner of a lecture was saying, "Now hear this, we ought to praise God very much, who has made so much for the service of mankind, namely all animals and all fruit." And those sinners listened carefully, and although at first they laughed, they began to weep etc. And after they had eaten the cooked food Christ said, "Now think if this corruptible food gives such a taste etc., what ought it be from the incorruptible food of heaven, because when the king give to his servants such savory food, what are those foods which he keeps for himself?" So from these publicans many were converted to God and wept. Also after they ate, cooked in water [? coctum in aqua], so much so that it is believed that all of those were converted. Such was the power of the words of Christ. And when they were almost at the end of dinner, the Pharisees looking in, because the doors were opened, said to his disciples, because they were eating near the door, "Why [does your master] eat and drink with publicans and sinners?" (Lk 5:30). As if they were saying, "It is clear what he is like. Tell me with whom you go with, and I will tell you what you do." Hearing this Christ called them to him. And they, puffed up, were before him saying, "What do you want?" Christ said, "You say to me when in a certain city there are many sick, who needs a doctor, the healthy or the sick?" And they, understanding, preferred not to respond. And Christ, "Do you not wish to answer? I say to you, the healthy do not need a doctor, but those who are ill." (Cf. Lk 5:31). This one was sick with pride, and now is cured, and that one with avarice, and so of the others. Therefore Augustine says, "The great doctor

from heaven comes to us, because great is the one lying sick through the whole world. Then he says, "I came not to call the just, but sinners," (v. 32). And the Jews, in confusion, withdrew. Clear then is the fruitful invitation, for because of the fact that he was converted, he worked to convert others.

Morally [in the moral sense of scripture], we have here a teaching how each of us ought to care if he is on the way of salvation, about his family, about his neighbors, a husband about his wife, and vice versa. About the family, that they confess, and receive Communion at Easter, that they attend Mass and hear sermons, and not work on feast days. "But if any man have not care of his own, and especially of those of his house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel," (1 Tim 5:8).

VIRTUOUS OPERATION

As for the third, namely, virtuous action, or virtuous operation, namely of the works which he did after he was converted. It is said how after the resurrection of Christ, the ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit, the apostles divided up the world for preaching and converting mankind etc. And St. Matthew went to Ethiopia preaching, and working miracles, illuminating the blind, and so for the others. And he converted many peoples to Christ. Behold the virtuous actions, or the virtuous operations.

It is said that once when he was preaching that there was a great tumult and wailing in the people of the death of the only son of the king. And when the tomb was being prepared, a certain Christian, the eunuch whom Philip baptized in Acts 8 went to the king saying to him that a holy man was in the city, who could raise him from the dead, etc. The miracle is told as is found in the History. And the prophecy was fulfilled, "I called him alone, and blessed him, and multiplied him," (Is 51:2).

If you wish to learn morally through a question, what was the reason why St. Matthew alone converted that nation, namely all of Ethiopia, and Egypt, and since now there are so many preachers, what is the reason why we are not converting the Jews of today, etc. It is said that the apostles lived a holy life and preserved good teaching, and they wanted nothing more than the honor of God and the salvation of souls. So the Apostle said, "But having food, and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content," (1 Tim 6:8). In these times we are deficient in our lives, because we men do not wish to hear daily the miracles of the saints, etc., and neither do we [preach] good teachings, just that of the poets etc. Nor do we care for the salvation of souls, but only for things and friends, etc. The same for clergy selling sacraments. Not only are the infidels not converted, but even the faithful are scandalized [pervertentur] and lose their faith. Therefore the Apostle, "For all seek the things that are their own; not the things that are Jesus Christ's," (Phil 2:21).

GLORIOUS PERFECTION

As for the fourth, namely the glorious perfection. For he was martyred, for the defense of a certain nun. First, the monastery, I have read [in the [Golden Legend](#)], was that

which St. Matthew founded. It is said how after he converted that land, the king which he had converted died, whose daughter, Ephigenia by name was with other virgins, dedicated to God by taking the sacred veil. And the king succeeding her father, a foreigner, wished to have her in marriage. The story goes, and how was it told to the king, that he would never have her unless with the permission of the apostle Matthew, because he was their prior. So the king called him saying that he would marry her. Then St. Matthew thought about it. If I tell him now, he might kill me, and my testimony would not be made known etc. Therefore he said to the king that on the following Sunday he would be at Mass [in officio] and he would there commend marriage. And so it happened. On the following Sunday the apostle said, how marriage was holy and instituted by God in the earthly paradise. Second, that it was honored by Christ in the first of his miracles. Third because from it the cathedral is filled, etc, namely of heaven. Fourth, it is conserving of human nature. Thus Christ wished that his mother have a spouse, etc. But afterwards he said, that a person would be a traitor, who would wish the spouse of the king to be given away as a wife etc. Note here well, in the legend, because of this St. Matthew was pierced with a lance and martyred.

It is said that it [marriage] with nuns and clergy is a sin, because it is a sacrilege. It is said to be like this, it would be a greater sin to throw the holy sepulcher of Christ into a latrine, than if the all the tombs of the saints were thrown in.