

1214
1806

Monday Prayer - 823

21.9.81

18.9.89

Story Bc. [Burgon]
O'Hanlon Tom
(Elgar)

PRAYER: St Matthew

HNU-E-728,
2

A man with wings — the perennial human dream of being able to fly like the birds of the sky, has produced numerous pictures and drawings and stories of men with wings, from Icarus of Greek legend to the annual English south-coast jamboree ^{that used appear regularly} [we saw recently] on TV news of people jumping off a platform over the sea, trying to make just a few hundred yards through the air on arm-power alone. ^{And there's now the strict relatively new sport of hang-gliding} But in ant symbolism, the man with wings is just one person, St Matthew, the apostle and evangelist of Christ. ^{his festival day comes up this week I thought to} [today's his feast day] Let him be a starting-point for our prayer and reflection. ^{his name} Matthew was, perhaps, the most unlikely of all the unlikely men that Jesus chose to be His close disciples and apostles. He was, after all, a tax-gatherer, a class of men that were hated and despised and considered outcasts and, in some sense, traitors to their own people. I can't think of any real modern-day equivalent of the tax-collector of Jesus' time and place, for tax-gathering then was a rather unique system in the political and economic structure of the Roman empire. Very very different from your Inland Revenue officer today, your tax-assessor with his computer and array of clerks and files. The grumbles and complaints and jokes we make about the tax-man have nothing on the attitude of people towards a man such as St Matthew was. It was already pretty scandalous of Jesus just to talk with such a man: but He did, and invited Matthew to leave his profession and follow Him, and then accepted Matthew's invitation to have dinner with himself

and a group of his tax-gathering friends. "He eats with sinners" was what was said about Jesus afterwards, and that remained the horrified complaint against Jesus and His way of life. "Follow me" was what Jesus said to Matthew — and he did. That invitation has become the summary of every Christian vocation, to be a Christian or to serve others — the Christian community, Matthew's profession and status in society, his previous life, didn't exclude him from being called: nor does it anyone. The point is that Matthew responded immediately and with enthusiasm, and went on to become not only one of the 12 apostles of Jesus but the compiler of the teachings and sayings and work of His Master that we know as the first of the 4 gospels. Matthew was open to the call he received, and shared the Good News, making it specifically available to his own people and to people like himself who were the 2nd class, not really acceptable, citizens of his time and place. The particular features and style and so on of his Gospel, you can learn from the many books and scripture-guides, both popular and professionally academic, that the biblical scholars have been producing. But for the moment, think about the man himself and his story, his experience of Christ and with Christ. And in prayer let's ask through his intercession that we may learn and feel the great mercy of God, and to be open to answer His callings with generous enthusiasm, and trust in what He wants us to be and to do. And let's pray for everyone whom Christ calls in a special way and who, maybe, are hesitating or fearful about leaving everything to follow Jesus, like Matthew did. || It's Matthew's gospel that gives us the full version of what we know as the Lord's Prayer —

RCA.V. 1321 Let's listen to it in music now. It's setting by M'Dermott, song by parish

27

choir of St Mark's, New York

MUSIC - PRAYERS [Brow
poin 93]

One of the

many parables of Jesus that St Matthew gives us in his gospel is about people being called at different hours of the day to go and work in a vineyard — [it was, in fact, the gospel reading for yesterday's Sunday Mass; ^{it is} (and also) the source of the common expression in English about the "11th hour". That story of Jesus has been given all kinds of interpretations and explanations, and to many people it seems a very unjust and unfair story. St Irenaeus in the second century thought that the labourers in the story, hired at various hours of the day, stood for the various ages of humankind. Origen, a little later, took the vineyard to be the church and the labourers those called to it. St John Chrysostom in the 4th century said that the vineyard means the commandments and ordinances of God: the time for labour, the present life: the labourers those who are called in various ways to the service of God: and the hours represent the various ages at which people turn to God. Whatever about these, and other allegorical interpretations, let's think of St Matthew today, and what might have been his feelings and understanding of Jesus' story, as he remembered it and collected it into his gospel presentation. What hour of whatever day isn't so important as the loving and merciful call of God, and how it's received in our human hearts. May it make of us, and all who hear it, men and women who will strive to soar above our natural limitations, to fly free in the air of God's grace, His light and warm love, to reach to and be with God.