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21 THURSDAY

St Matthew, Apostle & Evangelist

Ephesians 4: 1-7, 11-13

Ps 18: 2 - 5

Matt 9: 9 - 13

Of all the followers Jesus called to be His close friends and then apostles, surely Matthew must be the most controversial and different from the others. For one thing, he was likely the most “worldly-wise” of the whole group: he was, after all, a ‘professional’ among mostly fishermen. But his “profession” was, in those days, not a very reputable one: in fact, it was considered a sinful occupation because tax-collectors made their living by squeezing money from people, and they were sometimes really harsh and grasping. That Jesus counted tax-collectors (and therefore sinners) among His friends was a constant criticism of Him by self-righeous people.

The gospel of Matthew is very brief about the actual calling of Matthew himself (it just says Matthew got up from his office seat and walked away to follow Jesus). But it says more about what happened afterwards at the dinner-table, when Jesus strongly spoke up for His new friend. To pharisees, who were so keen on exact observance of God’s word and laws, He said: “Go and learn the meaning of the words: What I want is mercy, not sacrifice”. They must have been shocked at this; and even more when He said He had come to call sinners, not those already virtuous. Good Christians are sometimes shocked to be reminded of these words of Jesus, and that He spent time with people who were considered socially “improper”

There is room for every sort of person among Jesus’ friends, and each of us has our own special place and role at His table. But we have to mature together in friendship with all of the others, in the body of Christ.