

The Feast of St. Matthew the Apostle, Evangelist: (Jn. 3:13-17)

Today the Church celebrates the feast of St. Matthew the Apostle. The Gospel focusses on the call of Matthew (who is called “Levi” in Luke’s Gospel) and from this we learn that he was a hated tax collector.



Each one of us is invited to respond to Jesus’ call to us, and by His grace, to be open to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who leads and guides the Church in her vocation of mission to the world. This wonderful painting by Caravaggio¹ shows us how the Holy Spirit inspired St. Matthew to write the Gospel which bears his name.

Note that St. Matthew is wearing earthy colours and has bare feet; both of which indicate humility before God (recall that Moses was commanded to remove his shoes in the presence of God [c.f. Exodus 3:5]). St. Matthew is engaged in writing but turns to the angel who is giving him a list of things to say. All Sacred Scripture is the word of God put down by humans in their own circumstances of life (Vatican II Dei Verbum 11). Note the detail in St. Matthew’s face; Caravaggio has given him real character, which was revolutionary in his day. In general, saints had been portrayed with pale skin to reflect their purity, representing the work of grace in their lives. However, Caravaggio does include a faint halo around St. Matthew’s head to indicate that he is indeed a saint who reflects the uncreated light of God in His life and work. By painting him as an individual, Caravaggio shows that St. Matthew brings all who he is to his work, so it is truly his work, but inspired by the Holy Spirit. Note how Caravaggio has made the stool appear to protrude over the edge of the picture, into “our” space. The same goes for the book on the table. These are devices used by the artist to show that what St. Matthew’s writing is not just for his time but for all time – i.e. “our” time too.

Jesus called St. Matthew to follow Him, and because he did, the Holy Spirit worked through Him in an amazing way, well beyond any of his wildest dreams, I imagine. The question is, how will we respond to the Lord’s call to us? Are we open to the grace of the Holy Spirit who is ready to equip us for the work of spreading the Good News of salvation in Christ?

Carol Ann Harnett 21st September 2020

¹ Picture credit: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio - <http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/caravaggio/matthew.jpg>, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=136502>