

Friday, Thirteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Matthew 9:9-13

'What I want is mercy, not sacrifice'.

REFLECTION

There are many questions posed in the course of the four gospels. Some of them are asked by Jesus, others are asked by his disciples and still others are asked by various other characters in the gospel narrative. In the Gospel of today the Pharisees ask a question about Jesus. It is the kind of question we can all ask: *'Why does Jesus eat with tax collectors and sinners?'* Sharing a table with someone implies entering into communion with them. Jesus therefore is being perceived as becoming friends with people who ought to have been shunned by religious figures of those times. The answer to that question is that Jesus' primary mission was to reveal God's mercy and forgiveness to those who had sinned in some way. Jesus responds to the question quoting the prophet Hosea: *'What I want is mercy, not sacrifice'*. It means that his mission is very much shaped by the mercy propagated by the prophet. The God he has come to serve is a God of mercy who showers his mercy upon all. While the religious leaders of the time shunned tax collectors and sinners for their past failings, Jesus wanted them to know that God was more interested in people's future than in their past. For example, when Jesus saw Matthew, he saw Matthew's future, not just his past. Matthew may have exploited his own people to enrich himself, as most tax collectors did at that time, but Jesus saw his potential to be a true disciple. Indeed, Matthew went on to become one of the twelve Jesus gathered about himself. The stand of Jesus shows that our failings do not drive him away. On the contrary, they can bring him closer to us, if we acknowledge them and open our hearts to the boundless mercy he offers us. In other words, the church is a community of forgiven sinners. All of us always stand in need of God's forgiveness. Jesus shows us that God's forgiveness is in plentiful supply, if we only acknowledge our need of it. The Lord continues to call us into communion with himself, regardless of how often we might have broken communion with him in the past.