



September 27, 2020

Dear friends of God,

I write this letter on Monday afternoon. Today is the feast day of the Apostle of St. Matthew. He was an early follower of the Lord Jesus. He was called to discipleship as Jesus passed by him and invited him to come, follow me. By our baptism, we are called to follow the Lord. We are disciples. The word "discipleship" comes from the Latin for student. We are each invited by Jesus to be his students. We are meant to study him; his Word and his mission. We are even to ingest him in the Body and Blood of Christ as we hope to be marinated in the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom of Heaven is a reality where our love for God overflows in our love for our neighbor and even for our enemies. It is God's Reign where we live heaven on earth as we prepare for heaven by caring for those most forgotten with love and compassion. St. Matthew was an Apostle, one of the most intimate of Jesus' companions. These original 12 Apostles were the "ones sent." We are reminded of this in the last verses of the Gospel of Matthew: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." I've always liked that ending, especially the knowledge that Jesus will always be with us. The Gospel is named for Matthew as an honoring of his memory and a continuation of his teaching ministry as an Apostle. It is a Gospel that is oriented towards discipleship. We might find ourselves apprehensive of calling ourselves disciples. We may even see ourselves as failed students or ones needing a remedial class in faith in Jesus Christ. The goodness is that even though we are called to share our life as followers of Jesus as disciples and even apostles sent out, none of us is an expert in Jesus or in faith. We are all stumbling towards the Kingdom of Heaven together. St. Matthew and the earliest followers of Jesus were no different than us and they even had his early presence to teach them.

St. Matthew wasn't just a tax collector in our modern sense. He took money from his own people and gave it to their oppressor. Jews despised tax collectors more than they did the Romans. He was in the middle of this when Jesus called him. Our past is no obstacle to discipleship (Maryknoll tweet).

St. Matthew was taking advantage of his own people for his own benefit and for the Romans who were oppressing his people. Even with all that, Jesus called Mathew to "follow him." In that invitation to follow him, Jesus reminds all of us that he is our Divine Physician who is to heal us from our sin sickness. Jesus desires "...mercy not sacrifice." Jesus is the Son of our God of Radical Mercy and wants us to follow him to live his Kingdom of Mercy. Sister Catherine McAuley, the founder of the Religious Sisters of Mercy, reminded us that "We should be shining lamps, giving light to all around us." The lamp that needs to shine in our lives and faith in Jesus, in our discipleship needs to be that of God's mercy that we share with all those whom we encounter.

I want to encourage us once again to spend time reading the Gospel of Matthew. I made the same recommendation some months ago, but taking time to delve into this Gospel which we have been doing since last Advent will help us to get a glimpse of what discipleship looks like for people seeking to be students of Jesus. Word and Sacrament (Jesus' Body and Blood) gives fuel for our lamps of mercy in a world darkened by hate and indifference and needing the brightness of our God who is Mercy within Mercy within Mercy.

Much love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fr. Ken".

"Prayer is not only a daily discipline that deepens our relationship with God; it also provides a way for us to be together in our aloneness."

- Mister Rogers