



*Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, **Follow me!***

*9 And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, **Follow me.** And he arose, and followed him. (Matt 9:9)*

Today is the Feast Day of St. Matthew the Apostle. Christ found him busy at his work of collecting customs. On the command to follow Him, without question, Matthew arose and followed. How less painful would our life experiences be if we simply dropped the things of this world and followed Christ at His first call. In the military, the bugle sounds First Call prior to Reveille and formations. It is a signal of call to duty. If a soldier ignores first call, he will be in trouble at the next bugle call.

Idle hands are neither needed nor desired in the Kingdom of Heaven. God desires DOERS of the Law and not hearers only. How many pulpit wonders prance up into America's pulpits, dressed to the tens, every Sunday and preach a fair sermon from Scripture; and the following day take six days of undeserved rest from lifting a finger to help the poor, visit the sick, or clothe the naked? In calling His disciples, Jesus always called men who were busying themselves in productive labor. See how He calls Peter and Andrew, James and John by the shores of blue Galilee: *And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, **Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.** And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.* (Matt 4:18-22) All men were busy in their labors DOING with all of their might that which presented itself of work. One is reminded of the words of the Preacher of Ecclesiastes: *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.* (Eccl 9:10)

So is this a salvation of good works? Not at all, but rather a salvation unto good works. There must be some empirical evidence in our daily lives to suggest that a change has taken place when we come to Christ – that change is evidenced in the good and compassionate works we do that typify the Lord who called us unto them.

The Gospel for today (St. Matthew the Apostle) is taken from St. Matthew 19:16-21. It is the account of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus inquiring of what "good

thing” he could do to inherit eternal life. This may seem contradictory to the good works mentioned above, but it is not! Let us examine this account in detail:

*16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? 17 And he said unto him, **Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.** 18 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, **Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,** 19 **Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.** 20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? 21 Jesus said unto him, **If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.** (Matt 19:16-21) We have studied this story many times over the past few years. I love the story because it points to the cardinal points of the Gospel.*

Note the APPROACH to Jesus of the rich young ruler: “*And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master.*” He came to the right Person to ask his question. St. Mark adds some detail to the account: *And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?* (Mark 10:17) He came humbly kneeling, and he came hurriedly. We must all come in this way to Christ.

God hides many precious gems of truth in His Word, and He does so in the most concise use of words. He tells us more in one sentence than great authors can do in a large volume. Our literary and intellectual faculties, though they may be noteworthy, are useless to open the hidden truths in God’s Word unless our hearts be in earnest for Christ.

The unmitigated Grace of God extends to people of every background and social standing; to the Centurion as well as to the man stricken of leprosy; to the poor blind man as well as to the well-heeled man of the Sanhedrin; and to the depraved and violent as well as to the morally upright, though faithless, man of society. God has chosen His elect from all these varieties of people. We should not trouble ourselves so much with ‘why God has chosen others’ as to make our own election sure in Christ.

We are presented, in today’s text, with a man who “*came running*” to Christ and “*kneeled*” before Him in the way. The young man has done well so far. He runs to Christ. He kneels to Christ. This, must we all do if we come at all. But true faith is revealed in the wholeness of our lives and not in an instant of it. The young man’s salutation, as well as his question, begins to run amiss of the mark: “*Good Master*” means, in the vernacular of the day, “*Good Teacher*”. Is that ALL Christ is to this young man? His salutation would have been more fully informed to call Him “*Good Lord*” for reasons to be revealed in the continuing dialogue.

Note the wrong premise of the young man’s QUESTION: The young man’s question also is full of error in understanding: “*What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?*” What is wrong with this question? Well, first of all, we do not INHERIT eternal life – it is a free gift of Grace. Secondly, the question presumes that we may be saved by our good works. It is not what we DO that brings salvation, but the One in Whom we believe!

The Lord’s RESPONSE: ***Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God?*** This is a question pregnant with meaning. Christ reveals the man’s ignorance of Christ’s Person and Nature. Does this man recognize Christ as God? There is none good but God. Christ is good because Christ is also God. None other of our race can say, finally, that we are good. *For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.* (Rom 3:23) and *.....there is none righteous, no, not one!* (Rom3:10). This rhetorical question is

intended to provoke a spark in the young man's mind, and in ours. Do we know that Christ is ALL good, and that we lack good apart from the imputed righteousness of Christ?

The Lord's COUNSEL: Christ then reminds the young man of the Commandments by citing five only. ...*Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live* (Prov 4:4). The Lord is preparing the young man's mind to grasp his failure, as well as the falsity of his claim, in keeping the Commandments of God. The young man responds : "*And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.*" It is quite possible the young man has been conscientiously faithful to these five Commandments mentioned, however, he has been remiss in keeping the most important one – the very first that God wrote with His very finger on the Tables of Stone: *I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before me.* (Deut 5:6-7) This wealthy young ruler allowed wealth to eclipse his full loyalty to God! It is noteworthy that the Lord mentions only those Commandments that deal with our dealings with other men – except the first four dealing with our duty to God, and the last which is a particular indictment of the condition of the young man's heart – coveting! But it should be observed that the dialogue that follows reveals that the young man has omitted keeping the very first Commandment.

My heart is moved at the compassionate and gentlemanly approach Jesus takes in opening the eyes of this man. The moment he came to Christ, all of his shortcomings were known by Jesus, yet Christ did not hurl claims of sin and shortcomings at the man. He gently and knowingly guides the man to recognize the need lacking in his soul. Unfortunately, the young man could not go the distance.

Jesus loved this young man when He heard his simple response which the young man, no doubt, truly believed. But Jesus will open the man's eyes to see the answer to the question which he had brought to Christ. *"One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me."*

It is possible to come near the Kingdom of Heaven and, yet, not be admitted. Christ congratulates, kindly, the young man's zeal in trying to live righteously, but also points out that none of us can do so apart from the righteousness of Christ. – *"One thing thou lackest"* It is this ONE thing that makes all the difference in our Coming to Christ – the One Commandment that supersedes all others! The omniscience of Christ revealed to Him that this young man placed his riches above all other considerations. He loved well, but that love fell short of the mark. Look at the loving counsel of Christ to this poor sinner (unaware of his depravity). The CURE: *"Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me."* So simple, isn't it? But yet so difficult. "*If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off!*" Whatever it is that keeps us from coming all the way to Christ, dismiss it summarily and choose the greater good. There is no evil in "possessing many things" unless the love of those many things keeps you from coming to Christ. All men desire that their investment be placed at the most secure place, and return the greatest benefit. There is no greater security than that of heaven, and no greater return of interest.

*"Take up the cross, and follow me."* Oh! Is THAT all? Yes, I'm afraid it is! How unattractive the cross compared to opulence and power! The garden hoe is the least distinguished of all tools, yet it is the one tool that makes food for the table possible. Would we want to have the resurrection to life eternal? If so, we must die to self and abide in Christ. We must walk the 'Via Dolorosa' with Him. We must carry that

instrument of sacrifice **on** our way and **all** the way. Never mind those who stand by the wayside hurling words of ridicule and contempt. Christ rose on the third day according to the Scriptures. If we would rise, we must rise in Him!

This cross was too much for the young man. He wanted eternal life, but it was, to him, a business deal. It was not worth the investment required. So he went away sorrowful – almost, but not quite, saved.

*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.* There is a story (I know not if it is true, but consistent as an illustration) that the Eye of the Needle was a small and low gate on the north of Jerusalem. Because of the inconvenience of making entry there with their camels, many merchants with their camels elected to circumnavigate the city and enter at the south gate since it was less harrowing. To enter the Eye of the Needle, the merchant must cause his camel to kneel, remove the burdens of merchandise from its back, and literally crawl through the gate. This is the manner by which we come to Christ – on bended knee and our burdens removed by Him ere we make entry to His Kingdom. Yes, we must count the cost prior to signing the contract, but, once signed, the counting stops.

Have you allowed Christ to remove your unbecoming yoke and burden? If not, do so this very day of Lent, and remember: “*With God all things are possible!*”

Believest thou this, friends?