

FIRST READING: Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians:

Brothers and sisters: I, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace: one Body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. And he gave some as Apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 19:2-3, 4-5

***Their message goes out through all the earth.***

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day pours out the word to day, and night to night imparts knowledge.

***Their message goes out through all the earth.***

Not a word nor a discourse whose voice is not heard; Through all the earth their voice resounds, and to the ends of the world, their message.

***Their message goes out through all the earth.***

GOSPEL: Matthew 9:9-13

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

As Jesus passed by, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. He said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples. The Pharisees saw this and said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" He heard this and said, "Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. Go and learn the meaning of the words, *I desire mercy, not sacrifice*. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

The Gospel of the Lord.

### **Reflection for the Feast of Saint Matthew**

God's blessings can come to us in many ways. Sometimes God's greatest blessings can come in difficulty. Sometimes our greatest hindrance to realizing God's blessing is the guilt of our sins, the pains we suffer and the difficulties we face. We expect God to remove these things from our lives. Our expectation of how God should operate prevents us from seeing that our hindrances are the blessing. God never leaves us in our times of trouble, overwork and weakness. God heals our pain, forgives our sin and opens for us more life.

Paul has laid out for the Ephesians a plan of behavior with a vision of unity in Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Why did he do this? What did the Ephesians face as a community? Do Paul's words reveal their shortcomings and areas of weakness? I think they do. This was, after all, a group of people who were attempting to form a cohesive community as the Church of Jesus. They were people just like us. A community of Christians was a minority in their pagan or Jewish cities and towns. Some were slaves; some were wealthy. Some were Jewish; others were new converts from paganism. This was a diverse group. There were political, ethnic, linguistic, economic and cultural differences. How could cohesion become a possibility?

Paul's message of unity was relentless. There is one God, one Spirit, one Church and one Christ. He went further. There is one baptism, one faith, one mission and one gospel. This vision echoes the gospel of John. Father may they all be one as you and I are one. Jesus prayed this during the last supper on the night before he died with his disciples. His prayer was meant for all who will come to believe, be baptized and make up his Church. Did he have us in mind? How do Paul's words speak to us? More importantly can we hear them through the grace of the Holy Spirit? They have passed their mission onward, through the generations, to us. We strive for the kingdom of God.

Jesus approached Matthew face-to-face and invited him by name, "Follow me." Nothing could be more definitive and clear. Would that Jesus do the same for us? There could be no doubt in hearing the voice of God's call. Yet he has. How does God work? Through events, experiences and people we encounter. God even works through us too. Jesus did call us each by name; when we were baptized. The one who baptized us called our name upon the action of our baptism. God's voice was the voice of the one with the water. Yeah, I know, on one level it's not the same. Yet we now hear with the ears of faith and can recognize God's voice in those who speak to us.

Yet, amid the diversity in Ephesus, there was a real commonality. They were all people. As people they shared human nature. Slaves and the wealthy put on their pants one leg at a time. Jews and former pagans loved and cared for their families. They all had to eat in order to be healthy and live. There is also something, that as humans, they shared; they could err and sin. In that they needed Jesus to heal and forgive them. This is still the human condition. Jesus has healed and forgiven us. Through faith we know that Jesus will continue to do so. His cross and resurrection was effective for all. His once and for all mission unites us and transforms each of us into God's beloved child, as it was effective in the days of Paul.

When I was baptized, the rite was in Latin and the name the priest used was not really mine because he said it in another language, not English. My name is James, not Jacobus and I usually answer to Jim. Yet, here I am, a believer and member and minister of Christ's Church. I point out that as you read this reflection, you are too. The same Spirit that united the Ephesians in the days of the apostle Paul has been effective to this day and with us. His message echoes as the voice of Jesus calling and leading us to his Kingdom.

May we continue to hear the voice of Jesus calling us to new life and possibility.

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