



ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ

A BRIEF SERMON



«I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet» (Rev. 1:10)

Published by the Holy Womens' Coenobitic Monastery of St. Augustine Florina Greece —ph. (+30) 23850-28610 —imaaflo@yahoo.gr

Translation from
the Greek Leaflet #2640

Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew
Saturday 16 November 2024

(†) Bishop
Augustinos Kantiotēs

From a Tax-Collector to an Evangelist

We only have one life, my beloved. A person enters the world and **lives on earth once**, he can't come again. And of course, he dies only once - after that, is judgment. The New Testament preaches this great truth (Heb. 9:27). The other things we hear some people say regarding *reincarnation* are delusions and deceptions from the devil. The truth is, that after this present life, judgment awaits us, where our deeds will be assessed. This is why **the time we have now, is of immense, inestimable value**. We often hear that 'time is money.' 'We only live once, let's enjoy it,' people say impudently, turning their attention to different pursuits, material gains and worldly pleasures. But those things are very insignificant.

The saint we are celebrating today had loved riches, he was a slave to the passion of avarice. But there came a time when he realized that something superior exists, and then he made the decision, like the merchant who found the *priceless pearl*, (Mat. 13:46) to leave his riches and seek something loftier.

So who is that saint? What's his name? His name is **Matthew**. He was from Galilee, the son of Alphaeus, and he became one of Christ's twelve disciples. Matthew wasn't a poor, uneducated fisherman like the other disciples - he was different. How did he live? What did he achieve in his life? How did he become a saint? We'll talk a little about him now.

Matthew, my brethren, was a sinner, a great sinner. What was his occupation? He wasn't a shepherd or a farmer, no. He had an immoral occupation - what? He was a **tax-collector**. What does that mean? He paid the State with his own money, buying the public tax, and then he had

the right to collect it from the citizens. But he did this in a harsh and unjust way. When he should have collected one dollar, he collected ten dollars; he would give one dollar to the State and put the other nine in his pocket. In other words he was a swindler and a thief; that's what the people in that era considered him to be. Keeping the money that belonged to others and giving a little to the State, he succeeded in amassing great fortune. Matthew was very miserly. But lo, he fell into the nets of the great Fisherman.

One day Jesus passed by the tax-collector's booth, and at the time that Matthew was counting his money, the *thirty pieces of silver*, he heard Christ say to him, *Follow me* (Mat. 9:9). You would expect that this materialist would be indifferent, however something inexplicable occurred. Matthew suddenly stood up and followed the Lord! What was he thinking? It wasn't just a moment of zeal, he **honestly repented of his lifestyle** and remained firm in his decision. At that moment, he conclusively left his occupation as a tax-collector and professed his decision. He even celebrated it with a great feast in which, together with Jesus and His disciples, many of his friends, tax-collectors and sinners, participated in his joy. Matthew then distributed his wealth to the poor and became a disciple of Christ. He remained with Him until the end.

After the Resurrection and Pentecost, Matthew left Jerusalem and flew like an eagle to preach the faith of Christ. He went beyond the Euphrates River and Armenia, to places where Parthians and Medes dwelt, idolaters who were rough and vulgar and who ate raw meat, killed women, sacrificed children and had debaucheries - they were literally savage people. Who dared to approach them? And who then

founded churches there? Who transformed them? Who baptized them? Who made them Christians? St. Matthew.

How did all that happen? Through a miracle. What miracle? The faithless may not believe, but we believe. The apostle Matthew held a staff in his hand, which had been given to him by the Lord after ascetical struggles on a mountain. And when he was preaching the Gospel to those cannibals, whose mouths were red from blood, one old man with grey hair said to him,

“We’ll believe that your religion is true if you plant that staff you are holding, and it becomes a tree.” Then St. Matthew approached the doorstep of their temple, poked his staff into the ground and said, “In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,” and soon there was a huge tree there, laden with sweet fruit, and at its root, a stream with clean water spouted! Seeing that, the savages were astonished and believed - because if you believe, miracles occur. If you don’t believe, then you shouldn’t go to church or commune.

That’s how an **even greater miracle** occurred. What? Those savages, the wild beasts, the dead branches, became fruit-bearing trees. Because it’s not so amazing for a staff to become a fruit-bearing tree - it’s more amazing for an unhewn person, a rock, an unfruitful branch, to suddenly become placid, polite; a spiritual person with saintliness, works of faith and love; an ornament of the church, of the nation, of society.

I’ll leave aside other details and say that the Apostle Matthew, after performing many other miraculous signs and undergoing much for the love of Christ, concluded his life **as a martyr, by fire** in Syria, sealing his life in this way.

However, before I end, I will add the following: besides being an apostle, St. Matthew is also an evangelist. He wrote the **Gospel of St. Matthew**, the first book of the New Testament, which contains what he saw and experienced close to our Lord Jesus Christ. A person who reads it, must be as hard as a rock if they are not moved by it. St. Matthew describes the Lord’s life, teachings and miracles, His Crucifixion, Passion and Resurrection, and also His Second Coming and the judgment of the living and the dead. The beginning of the Gospel of St. Matthew is heard in church on the Sunday before Christmas.

In the person of the holy apostle and

evangelist Matthew who we celebrate today, we observe, my brethren, **important truths**.

✓ We see that **Christ accepts the repentance even of a great sinner**. When repentance exists, the Lord doesn’t have any difficulties in forgiving a person; He draws the sinner close to Him, raises him and glorifies him.

✓ We see that even a **tax-collector** can attain to becoming a **disciple, apostle and evangelist**.

✓ We see that faults and mercy —the many faults of a person and God’s mercy— are **two magnitudes that clash**, but the latter is victorious. This is why in the Service of Holy Communion, the holy author says poetically: I know, my Lord, very well, that:

*“Neither greatness of transgressions,
nor enormity in sinning,
can surpass my God and Saviour’s
great long-suffering and mercy
and exceeding love for mankind,
for with the oil of compassion
Thou dost cleanse and render shining
all those who repent with fervour,
and Thou makest them partakers
of Thy light in all abundance,
and true sharers of Thy Godhood.
And —O marvel for the angels and
for human understanding!—
Thou hast converse with them often
as with friends most true and trusted.
These things now do give me daring.
These things give me wings, O Christ God”...*

(7th prayer)

Tell me, my brethren, how many sins do you have? What you have done is nothing. Double that? It’s still nothing. Triple it? It’s nothing. What are sins? Fire, lit coal. Take a brazier,¹ take a pile of coal and make a mountain of lit coal. If you toss it into the ocean, who will win, the coal or the ocean? The ocean of course. So throw all the coal of your transgressions into the ocean of Divine Mercy, with repentance, and the ocean will extinguish them. How many do you have? One person has five sins, another has ten, another has a hundred, another has a whole mountain of sins. **No matter how many you have, they will be put out.** Amen.

(†) Bishop Augustinos

1. An open pan for burning coal, used for heating in the past.