

At hymn practice on Friday, Mrs Murphy asked us a big question: *what are your dreams?* And more than that, how might those dreams inspire the mission God has for you? One of Jesus' disciples shows us this kind of transformation better than anyone else. St Matthew, gospel writer and one of the twelve Jesus chose. And today, 21st September, is St Matthew's day.

Matthew began life in a very different place from where he ended up. He was a tax collector, sitting in a booth with his piles of money and his account book. People despised him. To them he was someone who had sold out for money, someone not to be trusted. Then one day, Jesus walked past. He looked at Matthew and said two words: *Follow me.*

That moment has inspired one of the most famous paintings of all time: Caravaggio's *The Calling of St Matthew*. It hangs in Rome, in the French national church of San Luigi dei Francesi. Matthew sits hunched over his coins, head down, while a shaft of light cuts across the darkness. Jesus stands in the doorway, his finger pointing straight at him. It is the exact moment everything changes: money on the table, the old life clinging on, and Christ's call breaking in like a beam of light. In that moment Matthew is already living the conclusion of today's Gospel: *you cannot serve God and money.*

Which did he choose? Matthew stood up and walked away from the table. The man who had spent his life adding up coins became the man who wrote a Gospel. The gifts he had were not thrown away; they were transformed. His sharp eye for detail and his careful writing became tools to tell the story of Christ. His whole mission changed, because he said yes. And that is why Matthew's story fits the message of the readings we hear today.

Amos warns those who trample the poor and treat people as though they were worth no more than a pair of sandals. That was the world Matthew worked in. He knew about systems that crushed the weak. He had been part of it.

The psalm tells us of a God who *raises the poor from the dust*. That is what Matthew experienced. He rose from his tax booth, lifted from shame into dignity by the call of Christ.

St Paul tells us that God *desires everyone to be saved*. Matthew proves it. Others saw only a tax collector who could not be trusted. Jesus saw the disciple he could become. In Matthew's

own Gospel, Jesus says: *Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves*. That is the balance Matthew learned. Faith that is trusting and open, but also alert and watchful.

And that is where I think of dogs. They are loyal and friendly, but they are also quick to sense when something is wrong. Faithful friendship like that is what Jesus asks of us. And imagine what kind of formidable disciples we would be if we had the natural alertness and warmth of dogs, with their obedience to their master, combined with all the gifts God has given only to us: human speech, thought and love. That is the strength of a Christian community on fire.

Matthew shows us what happens when you give that kind of faith to Christ. Your life is redirected. Your gifts are not wasted. They become part of God's mission. Matthew's story leaves us with the same choice: will we stay sitting at our booths, clinging to our dreams, or will we rise and follow Christ into mission?

St John Henry Newman, whose words speak so deeply to the mission of every Christian, once prayed: *God has created me to do him some definite service.*

*Somehow I am necessary for His purposes...*

*I have a part in this great work;*

*I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection*

*between persons.*

*He has not created me for naught. I shall do good,*

*I shall do His work;*

*I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth*

*in my own place, while not intending it,*

*if I do but keep His commandments*

*and serve Him in my calling.*

St John Henry Newman. Pray for us.

St Matthew. Pray for us.

St Gregory the Great. Pray for us.