

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

If you ever have the privilege of visiting the church of San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome, you will find there three canvases by Caravaggio, each depicting a scene from the life of St Matthew: his calling, his inspiration, and his martyrdom. In his rendering of the calling of St Matthew, Caravaggio depicts the scene we have just heard in the Gospel. Matthew is sitting in a darkened tax office with four other men, crowded around a number of coins on a table, surrounded by the tools of his trade.

And it is there that Christ enters and finds Matthew. It's not apparent that Matthew is searching for anything. He hasn't enrolled himself on a ministry experience scheme, or spent the last eighteen months facilitating "bubble church" in his parish. He's just there, doing his job, in the middle of his ordinary, compromised life. And according to Caravaggio, it turns out he's been sitting in the dark until this point. Jesus enters the room, and Matthew's face, lifted from the table, is illumined by the light of Christ. He seems shocked, and awkwardly points a finger to someone else — it's him you want, surely. Not me. You couldn't possibly want anything to do with me.

Notice that in the Gospel for his feast this evening, Matthew tells this story about himself, but he tells it in the third person. People who speak about themselves in the third person

usually find their way onto some sort of list. But in Matthew's case it's a more encouraging trait. He speaks as one who has learned that his life is no longer about him. As one who has discovered a new centre. Not "I." "He."

Perhaps that is the first mystery of vocation: that before we go looking for Christ, Christ has already come looking for us.

We live in a culture that treats vocation as an inward puzzle we are personally responsible for solving. Something like a spiritual Myers-Briggs exercise — as though God has hidden a code inside each of us, and if we do enough silent retreats, or write enough in a journal, or attend enough discernment weekends, we will eventually crack it and discover what we're for.

The Gospel has no patience with that logic. Matthew's vocation doesn't begin with Matthew finding himself. It begins with Christ stepping across the threshold of a grubby, compromised tax booth. Matthew wasn't looking for Jesus. Jesus found Matthew.

We ask: what is my purpose, what career will fulfil me, how do I become the most authentic version of myself. The Gospel asks a different, less comfortable question. Not what is my life for, but whom is my life for.

When Jesus looks across the coins and says, "Follow me," he doesn't hand Matthew a job description. There is no strategy

document, no explanation of where the road will lead or how the money will work out. He simply gives him himself. "Follow me." And Matthew gets up, leaves the table, and walks.

That shift from "I" to "He" is not just a nice literary observation about Matthew's Gospel. It's the whole of it. Christ calls. Christ heals. Christ forgives. Matthew disappears from his own story so completely that we barely learn a thing about him as a man — what he looked like, what he thought, what he felt leaving that table. We are told almost nothing except that he went.

Because going cost him something. His life before that day had lined his pockets and drained his soul, and Christ does not call him out of it to make him a slightly more respectable version of the same thing. He calls him into a life of charity, and daily obedience, and in the end, tradition tells us, into martyrdom — his own blood given, we are told, in Ethiopia. The man in Caravaggio's painting, still half-turned toward his money, does not yet know that this is where the light will eventually lead him. Neither, most days, do we. That is worth sitting with for a moment, because we are fond of vocation stories that end in fulfilment, and rather less fond of the ones that end at the point of a sword. Matthew's does both.

That is what vocation is, then. Not discovering what we happen to be good at, so that we can feel useful and valued. It is allowing the light of Christ to fall on us, and discovering

that our lives are not, finally, about us at all — that to be truly human is to learn to lay something down.

We can turn even the religious life into another game played for ourselves. We fret over whether we've done enough hours on the rota, whether we're sufficiently holy, whether we're on the right committees, whether God is suitably impressed with us. We can turn even the service of God into a clever way of staying at the centre of the stage.

Matthew shows us another way. The Christian life only truly begins when we stop trying to be the main character, and let someone else be.

The Christ who walked into that room in Galilee is no longer visible to us as he was to Matthew. But as St Leo the Great wrote, "what was visible in our Saviour has passed over into his mysteries." He speaks to us now through Scripture. His hand still reaches toward us in the mysteries of this church.

The mystery of our vocation, then, is not a puzzle we have to solve. The mystery is Christ. There is no code to crack. We need, rather, to be cracked open — to the needs of the stranger, and to the possibility that the life we are called to may look nothing like the one we had planned.

We may still feel as though we are sitting in the dark of our own tax booths, counting our coins, nursing our grievances, holding on to whatever we think keeps us safe. But the door

has opened. The light has fallen on us. And Christ looks at each of us and says the same thing he said to Matthew:

"Follow me."

Amen.