

MATTHEW AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

"As Jesus passed by, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. He said to him, 'Follow me.' (Matthew 9: 9)

Imagine if Jesus used a search committee and a focus group and had a series of risk management assessments for every disciple he was thinking of asking to follow him. I know---it would be purgatory! He would still be on earth looking for the perfect disciple. Thankfully, Jesus provides an example of calling others in freedom and spontaneity.

Jesus takes the initiative in calling the tax collector, Matthew. He must have recognized a quality about the man that was crucial to discipleship. While others were used to identifying this man with his trade, which was scandalous to his fellow Jews, Jesus saw beyond that and perhaps noticed the value of Matthew not caring what others thought. That bold characteristic is needed in one who is going to follow Christ in any age. If Matthew could stand the snide remarks and sarcastic comments from his own people and still show his face in the marketplace, maybe he was tough enough to be a disciple. If our self-worth only comes from what others think, then we are useless to God as evangelists.

Matthew left everything and followed Jesus. His action was more costly than that of Peter, James, or John. Matthew could not go back to collecting taxes, while the others could go back to fishing. Matthew's response was dramatic. All ties were cut. Matthew staked absolutely everything on Jesus. Christ was his only option.

The call of Matthew becomes a model for the New Evangelization both in the boldness of Christ calling to discipleship someone outside the established religious community, and in the generous response of Matthew, for he gave all to Jesus.

Like Christ, can we identify people who would have within them the seeds of radical discipleship? Can we challenge people to be as committed to Christ as they are to their jobs or favorite sports teams? The New Evangelization calls us to seek and rekindle the fire of faith in those who no longer belong to a parish or who have no active relationship with Jesus, yet have been baptized and confirmed.

The process of the New Evangelization is a sustained incentive to mission, which sends all Christ's disciples to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed, recognizing that our own backyard is mission territory. Its goal is to bring people more than just knowledge, communication skills, and tools. We must bring them to the person of Jesus. Our desire must stem from a genuine love of Christ, who desires to bring all into relationship with him for eternal salvation. We must freely and enthusiastically give what we have received for free. Matthew had no idea where he was going, but he did know who he was going with, and so do we. Let us respond to Jesus' command to come and follow him every day. Let us follow the example of Matthew and walk the road to sainthood day in and day out. - **Rev. Msgr. W. Ronald Jameson**