

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Feast of St. Matthias

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St. Mary's Seminary

May 14, 2018

It was forty-one years ago today, at St. Matthew's Cathedral in Washington, that I was ordained to the priesthood by His Eminence, William Cardinal Baum. What a joy to celebrate this anniversary here, in our nation's first seminary. I promise you that I will not reminisce (that I'll do on my 45th anniversary) or theologize (that you can do in class and on your own time). Instead, I'll say a word about today's feast, St. Matthias the Apostle, first about his background, second about his election, and third about his ministry.

The defection of Judas left a vacancy in the college of apostles and so, under Peter's direction, the Apostles set about filling it. They didn't have the benefit of a vocations office, an HR department, or an on-line recruiting site replete with tracking software. Peter and the remaining apostles, nonetheless, knew what they were looking for. They were looking for someone who was with Jesus throughout his earthly ministry, from the very beginning until he was taken up into heaven. And they were looking for someone who was a witness to the resurrection. In addition, the Apostles were looking for someone who, as today's Gospel intimates, was both disciple and a friend of Jesus, that is, one who absorbed what Jesus taught and knew what he was about, and was perhaps numbered among the 72 disciples whom Jesus first sent on mission. Two names popped up: Joseph and Matthias.

Note that, from the very beginning, the Church has established qualifications for those who would serve the Church in ministry. We see this again in the passage in the Acts of the Apostles which describes how the Order of Deacons was established. So as the Church reviews our qualifications for ordination or for other forms of serve - let us be humble and open to God's will - just as Matthias and Joseph were.

What about the election of Matthias? Again, this election of Matthias sets something

of a pattern. The Apostles did not call a hasty meeting to review resumes but instead they did the one fundamental thing the Church should always do before making any important decision; they prayed: "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show us which of these two you have chosen to take the place in this apostolic ministry from which Judas turned away" In a word, they prayed to know God's will.

The actual election procedure, drawing lots, we have to admit, strikes us as a bit capricious or arbitrary. It's best for us to see in the Apostles' method a radical trust in the Lord and an ardent desire not to impose their will on God's will. At some time in our lives we will feel that this or that decision on the part of the Church is arbitrary and capricious, arrived at with less than Cartesian clarity... Let us seek in those decisions God's will with a radical trust not unlike the Apostles.

The election of Matthias was not analogous to his becoming a partner in a law firm. It wasn't a moment of personal triumph or the fulfillment of a life-long ambition. Rather, Jesus confided to Matthias what he says to us in the Gospel: "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain" Once chosen, Matthias understood he was sent to proclaim the Gospel. Tradition tells us he proclaimed the Gospel throughout Judea, Ethiopia, & Jerusalem, and, that he died a martyr's death . . . One can surmise that his ministry was extraordinary fruitful as he opened the minds and hearts of many to Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life.

In the ordination of deacons and priests, the ordaining bishop says to the *ordinandi*: 'Relying on the help of the Lord God and our Savior Jesus Christ, we chose these, our brothers, for the Order of the Diaconate or the Priesthood.' If those words should be addressed to you this spring or any time in the near future, or if they have been addressed to you in the past, as they have to me, let us hear in them the echo of today's Gospel: "It was not you who chose me but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain" To go beyond our comfort zone, to go not necessarily to the place of our choosing, and there to bear the good fruit of evangelization and holiness, to engender in those we serve the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

St. Matthias, pray for us!