

Life of the Apostle Matthew

November 16, 2024

GOSPEL: Matthew 9:9-13

EPISTLE: 1 Corinthians 4:9-16

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Gospel: Matthew 9:9-13: Matthew as a Publican

Matthew was the son of Alphaeus (Mark 2:14), who was also called Cleopas, and Matthew's brother, James, was also one of the Twelve Apostles. Since Cleopas was the brother of Joseph, the Betrothed of the Virgin Mary, Matthew was Jesus' step cousin. See Figure 1 for details. Matthew's father, Alphaeus (Cleopas), along with the Evangelist Luke, met the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-18). And his mother, Mary, the wife of Clopas, was one of the myrrh-bearing women at the foot of the Cross and at the Tomb (John 19:25).

A number of tax collectors had come to John the Baptist for baptism (Luke 3:12-13). Matthew may have been one of them. John the Baptist's instruction to them was to hold to the Mosaic Law and collect only what was appointed, and avoid gouging people.

Matthew's given name was Levi (Mark 2:14, Luke 5:27, Matthew 9:9), but he later took the name Matthew ("The gift of Yahweh") after his call to follow Jesus. As a publican, Matthew worked at "the tax office" (Matthew 9:9, Mark 2:14, Luke 5:27), which could also be called a "toll booth" for collecting use fees. The toll collector could charge whatever fees the traffic would bear, so long as he paid the Roman government what they thought they should get. As a result, Matthew was a wealthy man and owned a large house.

Tribute, by taxation, had to be paid to the Roman government¹. Roman officials sold the right to collect taxes to the highest bidder. The tax commissioner, or chief publican, would then have to supply a certain amount of money from his area. He employed local people as the collectors (publicans) and both commissioner and collectors would tax excessively so that they made a good living as well as passing on what was required by the government. Zacchaeus was a chief publican (Luke 19:2) and Matthew was one of the local collectors.

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¹ Ralph Gower, The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times, Moody Press, Chicago, 1998, p. 178.

Taxes were collected² as “poll tax” and “ground tax”. In addition, taxes were collected on imports and exports. The “poll tax” was collected according to the population of an area. To determine how much tax the chief publican needed to collect, “a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered” (Luke 2:1). The “ground tax” amounted to the monetary equivalent of 1/10 of all grain and 1/5 of all wine and fruit grown. Imports and exports were taxed at tollbooths along the great public highways and seaports. It is the consensus among the Early Church Fathers³ that Matthew’s job was at one of these tollbooths.

Hatred of publicans in Palestine⁴ was so intense that the Rabbis declared them incapable of bearing testimony in Jewish court, because they were regarded as being so dishonest. The standard used by the Levitical judges was the agreement of two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15). Jesus repeated this standard for use in the Church (Matthew 18:16), and Apostolic Tradition followed Rabbinical tradition that was under strict requirements to inquire diligently into every matter (Deuteronomy 17:2-7). Some questions asked by the Early Church bishops⁵ were: “Is this the accused’s first case, or does he do this habitually? What is the character of the two or three witnesses? Are they jointly consenting in a lie, as did the Jewish leaders against Christ?” “Let the witnesses⁶ therefore be meek, free from anger, full of equity, kind, prudent, continent, free from wickedness, faithful, religious; for the testimony of such persons is firm on account of their character, and true on account of their mode of life”. In this light, publicans were legitimately excluded from testimony in court. Also citing the Scriptures (Deuteronomy 23:18), the Rabbis classed publicans with harlots and homosexuals and refused to accept their charitable gifts.

When John the Baptist came preaching repentance and the Coming of Christ, a number of tax collectors came to John for baptism (Luke 3:12-13). Matthew may have been one of them. John’s instruction to them was to hold to the Mosaic Law and collect only what was appointed, and avoid gouging people.

When Jesus called Matthew, the publican, He called someone who was the outcast of Jewish society. Immediately after Jesus called him, Matthew gave a great feast in his house, and he invited a great number of other tax collectors (Luke 5:29) and “sinners”, along with Jesus’ disciples (Mark 2:15). This feast was so prominent that the Scribes and Pharisees complained to Jesus’ disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus answered with His much-quoted reply, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice’. For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Matthew 9:12-13). This feast described by Matthew in his Gospel has been chosen as the Gospel lesson for the Feast Day of the Apostle Matthew (November 16) to illustrate the mercy of God that had been shown to Matthew.

Jesus criticized the Pharisees and lawyers later, saying, “For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners! But wisdom is justified by all her children’” (Luke 7:33-35).

² Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, Hendrickson, Peabody, MA, 1994, pp. 52-54.

³ Tertullian, “On Idolatry”, I, ii, 12.

John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Timothy*, XI, Moral

⁴ Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, Hendrickson, Peabody, MA, 1994, pp. 55-56.

⁵ Roberts and Donaldson, *Apostolic Constitutions* II, 6, 47, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 7.

⁶ Roberts and Donaldson, *Apostolic Constitutions* II, 6, 49, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 7.

John Chrysostom commented⁷ on this to say that the Lord did not congregate with publicans as if He were one of them, but He sought them out where they were to lead them back to the Faith:

“For such is the quality of a physician; unless he endures the corruption of the sick, he does not free them from their infirmity. And yet He incurred here an evil report: first by eating with him, then in Matthew’s house, and thirdly, in company with many publicans. See how they reproach Him with this. And He was not ashamed, but overlooked all these things, that he might accomplish what He had set before him; which was accordingly done. For the publican was actually converted, and thus became a better man”.

“And to teach you that this great thing was done by his partaking of the table with him, hear what Zacchaeus, another publican, said. When he heard Christ saying, ‘Today, I must stay in your house’, the delight gave him wings, and he said, ‘The half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold’. And to him Jesus said, ‘This day has salvation has come to this house’ (Luke 19:5-9). So it is possible by all ways to give instruction”.

“But how is it, one may say, that Paul commands, ‘If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator or covetous, with such a one do not eat?’ (1 Corinthians 5:11) In the first place, it is not clear whether he gives this charge to teachers also, and not rather to brethren only. Next, those at Matthew’s banquet were not yet perfect, nor had they become brethren. And besides, with respect to them that had become brethren, Paul commands to shrink from them when they continue to live as if they hadn’t. But these publicans had now ceased, and were converted”.

Clement of Alexandria⁸ connected Matthew’s and Zacchaeus’ experience to the words of Christ in the Beatitudes: Christ is not concerned with material things, but in finding that which was lost. He praises those who are meek by choice, not those who have been made meek by necessity.

“The commandment is expressed in these words, ‘Take heed and beware of covetousness. For a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of those things which he possesses’ (Luke 12:15). ‘For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?’ (Matthew 16:26) ‘Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body *is more* than clothing’ (Luke 12:22-23). ‘For your Father knows that you need these things’ Luke 12:30). ‘But seek first the kingdom of heaven, and its righteousness’ for these are the great things, and the things which are small and appertain to this life ‘shall be added to you’ (Matthew 6:33)”.

“Therefore Christ, who trains the soul, reckons one rich, not by his gifts, but by his choice. Zacchaeus, or, according to some, Matthew, the chief of the publicans, on hearing that the Lord had condescended to come to him, said, ‘Lord, and if I have taken anything by false accusation, I restore him fourfold’ (Luke

⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, 30, 2

⁸ Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, IV, 6

19:8); on which the Savior said, ‘The Son of man, on coming today, has found that which was lost’ (Luke 19:10).

Again, on seeing the rich cast into the treasury according to their wealth, and the widow two mites, He said ‘that the widow had cast in more than them all,’ for “they had contributed of their abundance, but she of her destitution’ (Luke 21:1-4). And because He brought all things to bear on the discipline of the soul, He said, ‘Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth’ (Matthew 5:5). And the meek are those who have quelled the battle of unbelief in the soul, the battle of wrath, and lust, and the other forms that are subject to them. And He praises those meek by choice, not by necessity”.

By leaving his job at the tax office, Matthew laid aside a well-paying trade for no worldly benefit and no worldly return. In addition, Matthew also left⁹ all his worldly possessions behind. When Jesus called others to do the same thing, such as the rich young synagogue ruler, they couldn’t do it (Mark 10:17-22, Luke 18:18-23, Matthew 19:16-22). For making such a choice as the Twelve did in leaving everything to follow Jesus, they incurred a special reward (Matthew 19:27-30).

John Chrysostom spoke¹⁰ of covetousness and love of money as a disease. Publicans had this disease more than most, but Matthew stripped himself of the mischief, quenched his thirst, and followed after spiritual gain. Others like Judas, Gehazi, Achan, Ahab, Ananias and Sapphira were not able to do that.

“Whoever fell into this disease, and was easily rid of it? That well-known Zacchaeus. For who could be more fond of money than a publican? But all at once he became a man of strict life, and put out all that blaze. Matthew in like manner; for he too was a publican, living in continual rapine. But he likewise all at once stripped himself of the mischief, quenched his thirst, and followed after spiritual gain. Considering therefore these, and the like to them, do not despair. For if you will, quickly you shall be able to recover. And if you please, according to the rule of physicians, we will prescribe accurately what you should do”.

“It is necessary then to be right in this, that we never despair of our salvation. Next, we must look not only upon the examples of those who have done well, but also upon the sufferings of those who have persisted in sin. For as we have considered Zacchaeus and Matthew, even so ought we also to take account of Judas (John 12:6), Gehazi (2 Kings 5:20-27), Achan (Joshua 7), Ahab (1 Kings 21:1-19), and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), in order that by the one, we may cast out all despair, and by the other cut off all indolence. And let us teach people to say what the Jews said on that day, approaching Peter (Acts 2:37, see also 16:30), ‘What must we do to be saved?’ And let them hear what they must do”.

The change in lifestyle for Matthew (and Zacchaeus) after the banquet was dramatic. Prior to that, Matthew lived in luxury in a large house with servants at his disposal. After the banquet, he had no income and began to follow Jesus, supported only by the donations of what came to be known as the Myrrh-bearing women (Luke 8:2-3). Gregory of Nyssa addressed¹¹

⁹ The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2003, November 16.

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XI, 9

¹¹ Gregory of Nyssa, A Sermon for the Day of Lights

this: Matthew imitated Zacchaeus in making restitution for his life as a tax collector and in giving his goods to the poor.

“For as darkness is dispelled by light, and black disappears as whiteness is spread over it, so the old man also disappears when adorned with the works of righteousness. You see how Zacchaeus, by the change of his life, slew the publican, making fourfold restitution to those whom he had unjustly damaged, and the rest he divided with the poor — the treasure which he had before gotten by ill means from the poor whom he oppressed. The Evangelist Matthew, another publican, of the same business with Zacchaeus, at once after his call changed his life as if it had been a mask¹². Paul was a persecutor, but after the grace bestowed on him an Apostle, bearing the weight of his fetters for Christ’s sake, as an act of amends and repentance for those unjust bonds which he once received from the Law, and bore for use against the Gospel. Such ought you to be in your regeneration; so ought you to blot out your habits that tend to sin. For after the grace bestowed, we are called His children”.

The First Year of the Church: Matthew Drafts His Gospel

The current scholarly opinion on when Matthew drafted his Gospel, if indeed it was Matthew himself, is 70-110 AD based largely on scholarly work done by the German higher critics in the late 19th century. This scholarly opinion contrasts sharply with Orthodox tradition – which the scholars dismiss as being “not scholarly”. This document will explore Orthodox tradition much more extensively in order to contrast it with the 19th century German higher critics.

The last mention of the Twelve as being together in Jerusalem is at the ordination of the seven “deacons” (Acts 6:1-7). At the martyrdom of Stephen and the others, which occurred just short of one year after Pentecost¹³, the saints “were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, where they went everywhere preaching the Word (Acts 8:4), except¹⁴ the Apostles” (Acts 8:1). Only Peter and John from among the Twelve seem to have remained in the Jerusalem area. When Herod later killed James, the son of Zebedee, with the sword (Acts 12:2), James had just returned from evangelism in Spain. It is, perhaps, significant that Luke doesn’t refer to the Twelve here and subsequently, since most of them had already left for missions abroad.

Before the Twelve Apostles left Jerusalem on their various missionary journeys, they divided the world up into various regions, then drew lots to see who went where. The Apostle John drew as his lot the area of Asia Minor¹⁵; however, he couldn’t go there immediately since Christ had given him the charge of caring for the Virgin Mary as his own mother (John 19:25-27). If the Virgin Mary passed away in the mid-50’s AD, John was delayed by this time in going on his own missionary journeys. To fill in for John, Paul did a lot of work in Asia Minor before the mid-50’s and left many of his Epistles with the Asia Minor Churches.

¹² Fr. Stephen Janos concludes that Matthew, like Zacchaeus, also made fourfold restitution, and in addition, distributed his remaining possessions to the poor. See the web site www.oca.org for Matthew’s Feast Day of November 16.

¹³ That is, Stephen was stoned on December 27th of the same year as the Crucifixion. See Nikolai Velimirovic, *Prologue From Ochrid*, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 27.

¹⁴ When Luke referred to “the Apostles”, he included the Seventy with the Twelve.

¹⁵ We see evidence of John’s Lot being Asia Minor from Revelation 2-3, the letters to the seven Churches. Plus, John spent most of the latter part of his life in Asia Minor.

Paul said of this, “Then last of all, as to an abortion, He was seen by me also. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was* with me. Therefore, whether *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed” (1 Corinthians 15:8-11).

As we will see later in this document, Matthew’s Missionary Journeys took him to Ethiopia, where he worked among the cannibals there; and he also died there. So he had to have written his Gospel before he left for Ethiopia, since he needed access to the genealogical records that were kept in the Temple in order to complete his genealogy of Christ (Matthew 1:1-17).

The death of Stephen began a major bloodbath in Jerusalem. Nicanor, another of the seven “deacons”, was martyred that same day also, along with 200 others in short succession¹⁶. According to tradition, Nicodemus also died as he and others were lamenting the death of Stephen, Nicanor and the others. The “great lamentation” (Acts 8:2) over the death of Stephen encompassed more than just Stephen. Gamaliel buried Stephen in his own crypt; then he buried Nicodemus in the same crypt, and was later buried there himself¹⁷ a few years later.

“Now Saul (Paul) was consenting to Stephen’s death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church entering every house and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison” (Acts 8:1, 3). In Paul’s testimony nearly 30 years later, he admitted that he forced them to blaspheme (Acts 26:11). This persecution lasted for about three years, or until 34 AD when Paul was converted on the road to Damascus. With Paul not leading the attack against the Christians, “the Churches throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace and were edified” (Acts 9:31).

In considering the spread of the Early Church, one might think about how terrible the persecutions were. However, as John Chrysostom put it¹⁸, this was actually a great benefit to the Church because it forced the teachers – The Apostles – to spread out throughout the world.

“The persecution turned out to be no light benefit, as ‘to those who love God all things work together for good’ (Romans 8:28). If they had made it their express study how best to establish the Church, they would have done nothing else but this; they would have dispersed the teachers. When Stephen was slain, when Paul was twice in danger, when the Apostles were scourged, then the Gentiles received the word, and also the Samaritans. Paul declared: ‘It was necessary that the Word of God should be spoken to you (the Jews) first; but since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles’ (Acts 13:46). It is no small part of providential management for Paul to be there. In this way that Voice of the Gospel, that Trumpet of Heaven is not shut up in Jerusalem. Truly this is the reason why it was there they were appointed to be called Christians, because Paul spent so long a time in Antioch!”

¹⁶ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, July 28.

¹⁷ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, August 2, December 27.

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XXV.

The consensus of many early writers¹⁹ is that Matthew drafted his Gospel in Hebrew at the request of the Jewish Christians prior to leaving the Jerusalem area for his missionary journeys. The other Apostles living in Jerusalem approved²⁰ such an undertaking for Matthew. Eusebius said of this²¹,

“For Matthew, who had at first preached to the Hebrews, when he was about to go to other peoples, committed his Gospel to writing in his native tongue, and thus compensated those whom he was obliged to leave for the loss of his presence”.

Jerome wrote²² about this Hebrew original, which still existed in his day, in the library at Caesarea.

“Matthew, also called Levi, apostle and before that a publican, composed a gospel of Christ at first published in Judea in Hebrew for the sake of those of the circumcision who believed, but this was afterwards translated into Greek though by what author is uncertain. The Hebrew itself has been preserved until the present day in the library at Caesarea which Pamphilus so diligently gathered. I have also had the opportunity of having the volume described to me by the Nazarenes of Beroea, a city of Syria, who use it. In this it is to be noted that wherever the Evangelist, whether on his own account or in the person of our Lord the Savior quotes the testimony of the Old Testament he does not follow the authority of the translators of the Septuagint but the Hebrew. Wherefore these two forms exist ‘Out of Egypt have I called my son’ (Matthew 2:14, Hosea 11:1), and ‘for he shall be called a Nazarene’ (Matthew 2:23)”.

Irenaeus wrote²³ that Matthew’s goal in drafting his Gospel was to emphasize the humanity of Christ.

“The Gospel according to Matthew was written to the Jews. For they laid particular stress upon the fact that Christ should be of the seed of David. Matthew also, who had a still greater desire to establish this point, took particular pains to afford them convincing proof that Christ is of the seed of David; and therefore he commences with an account of His genealogy”.

Origin also stated²⁴ that Matthew emphasized the humanity of Christ: “For Matthew, writing for the Hebrews who looked for Him who was to come of the line of Abraham and of

¹⁹ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, 1.

Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, I, 2

Eusebius, “The Writings of Papias”, Church History, III, 39

Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIV, 15

Schaff and Wace, “Appendix: The Canonical Epistle of Gregory of Nyssa”, 8, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, v. 6

Schaff and Wace, “Prefaces to Jerome’s Commentary on the Four Gospels”, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, v. 6

The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2003, November 16.

²⁰ The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2003, November 16, p. 709.

²¹ Eusebius, “The Order of the Gospels”, Church History, III, 24.

²² Jerome and Gennadius, “Lives of Illustrious Men”, II, 3, Post Nicene Fathers, Series II, v. 3.

²³ Roberts and Donaldson, “Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus”, 29, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 1

²⁴ Allen Menzies, “Origin’s First Book of the Commentary on John”, 6, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 10

David, says, ‘The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham’”. Origin continued²⁵, “I have learned by tradition that the Gospel according to Matthew, who was at one time a publican and afterwards an Apostle of Jesus Christ, was written first; and that he composed it in the Hebrew tongue and published it for the converts from Judaism”. Origin also stated²⁶, “Matthew is reported by tradition to have published his Gospel before the others, to the Hebrews, those, namely, of the circumcision who believed”.

John Chrysostom stated²⁷ that Matthew’s purpose in writing his Gospel was rooted in elaborating on Jesus’ humanity:

“Of Matthew it is said, that when those who from amongst the Jews had believed came to him, and asked him to leave to them in writing those same things, which he had spoken to them by word, he also composed his Gospel in the language of the Hebrews. And Mark too, in Egypt, is said to have done this self-same thing at the entreaty of the disciples”.

“For this cause then Matthew, as writing to Hebrews, sought to show nothing more, than that He was from Abraham, and David; but Luke, as discoursing to all in general, traces up the account higher, going back even to Adam. And the one begins with His generation, because nothing was so soothing to the Jew as to be told that Christ was the offspring of Abraham and David: the other does not so, but mentions many other things, and then proceeds to the genealogy”.

Tertullian also mentioned²⁸ Matthew’s purpose as being evident in the words he used to begin his Gospel:

“There is, first of all, Matthew, that most faithful chronicler of the Gospel, because the companion of the Lord. For no other reason in the world than to show us clearly the fleshly original of Christ, he thus begins his Gospel: ‘The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham’”.

Tertullian continued²⁹ to say the purpose of the four Gospel writers was not the same; because of this, they complement each other.

“Of the apostles, therefore, John and Matthew first instill faith into us; while of apostolic men, Luke and Mark renew it afterwards. These all start with the same principles of the faith, so far as relates to the one only God the Creator and His Christ, how that He was born of the Virgin, and came to fulfill the law and the prophets”.

Jerome stated³⁰ that the chief object of Matthew’s Gospel were the Jewish believers in Christ who adhered to the Law.

“The first evangelist is Matthew, the publican, who was surnamed Levi. He published his Gospel in Judaea in the Hebrew language, chiefly for the sake of

²⁵ Allen Menzies, “Fragments from Origin’s First Book of the Commentary on Matthew”, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v. 10.

²⁶ Allen Menzies, “Origin’s Sixth Book of the Commentary on John”, 17, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v. 10.

²⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, I, 7.

²⁸ Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ*, II, v, 5,22.

²⁹ Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, II, ii, 4, 2.

³⁰ Schaff and Wace, “Preface to Jerome’s Commentary on Matthew”, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, v. 6

Jewish believers in Christ, who adhered in vain to the shadow of the law, although the substance of the Gospel had come”.

Clement of Alexandria referred³¹ to Matthew’s Gospel as the “Gospel to the Hebrews”. Quoting from portions of it, since copies were still extant in his day, Clement pointed out some differences between the Hebrew and the Greek, which may reflect some editing by the Apostles to reflect the consensus of the Church.

According to the Acts of Barnabas³², the Apostle Barnabas carried a copy of the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew with him on his missionary journeys after he and Paul split up in c. 48 AD (Acts 15:36-40).

Hippolytus stated³³ that Nathanael brought a copy of the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew to India. This would have been about the same time that Barnabas and Paul had split up. It is also traditional³⁴ that Nathanael translated the Gospel of Matthew into some of the languages of India, using the gift of tongues that he had received at Pentecost.

Eusebius wrote³⁵ that Pantaenus, the head of the Catechetical School in Alexandria³⁶, had gone to India in the 3rd Century. There he found a copy of the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew that Nathanael had brought. Jerome concurs³⁷ with Eusebius that Nathanael had brought a copy of the Gospel of Matthew to India, and that Pantaenus had brought back from India a copy of one of the Hebrew manuscripts. There is the question as to whether the Christians in India could read the Hebrew Gospel anymore.

The hymns of the Church speak of Matthew and his Gospel as follows:

“The exceeding most wise Matthew³⁸, who was first to record the Gospel of Christ and illumined all creation under the sun, the excellent initiate of the mysteries of Christ, who is now honored with sacred hymns, begs forgiveness of sins for those who honor him with love”.

“O Matthew, friend of Christ³⁹, you forsook all things for the love of Christ without hesitation, you ardently followed after Him Who called you, being the first evangelist in the world, describing the hour of judgment”.

Matthew’s Lifestyle as an Apostle

Clement of Alexandria stated⁴⁰ that, following Pentecost, “the apostle Matthew partook of seeds, nuts, and vegetables, without flesh, just as John the Baptist, who carried temperance to the

³¹ Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, II, 9.

³² Roberts and Donaldson, “The Acts of Barnabas”, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

³³ Hippolytus, On the Twelve Apostles, Where Each One of Them Preached, 6-7.

³⁴ Nikolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, June 11.

³⁵ Eusebius, Church History, V, 10

³⁶ This school dated to the planting of the Church in Alexandria by the Apostles according to Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, I, ii.

³⁷ Jerome and Gennadius, Lives of Illustrious Men, II, 36

³⁸ “Sedalion for Matins of the Commemoration of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew, August November 16th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

³⁹ “Ode VI for Matins of the Commemoration of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew, August November 16th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁴⁰ Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor, II, 1.

extreme in eating locusts and wild honey”. This implies that Matthew lived the rest of his life in a strict Orthodox fast.

An Orthodox fast can be a short fast where one refrains from food and water, or it can be an extended fast where one refrains from certain foods. In the strictest form of this extended fast, one refrains from meat, fish, dairy products, olive oil and alcohol. During Jesus’ earthly ministry, the Pharisees fasted twice a week (Luke 18:12) on Monday and Thursday⁴¹. This was to remember Moses going back to Mt. Sinai the second time on a Thursday and returning on a Monday. The twice weekly fasts were also abstinence from all food from evening to evening.

Besides one day fasts, the Scripture also speaks of extended fasting where ordinary food was not consumed. This probably was something akin to Orthodox fasts where the faster consumes one uncooked vegetarian meal per day. Some examples are Queen Esther (Esther 4), King David (Psalm 35:9-16, 109:21-29), the people of Nineveh (Jonah 3), and Nehemiah and Ezra (Nehemiah 9:1-3).

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul fasted a lot. For example, besides keeping the appointed fast days such as the Day of Atonement (Acts 27:9), Paul and Barnabas fasted and prayed over the ordination of presbyters (Acts 14:21-23). As the Lord instructed (Matthew 6:16-18), Paul did not trumpet his fasting to sound spiritual, but we get hints that he did it a lot (2 Corinthians 6:5, 11:27).

One of the points of fasting was to subdue the fleshly desires. In the Mosaic Law (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), the Hebrew word *tsoom* (meaning “to cover the mouth” or to fast) is not used at all. Instead the people were instructed to “humble your souls” at the Day of Atonement. Fasting was just a means of doing so (see Ezra 8:21, Daniel 9:3, 10:12).

John Chrysostom commented⁴² on fasting to say that it brings blessings. One who prays and fasts is not covetous, but is light, wakeful and humble. The Apostles were almost always fasting, and this is why they were so effective..

“Do you see how He now proceeds to lay beforehand in them the foundation of His doctrine about fasting? You see, at any rate, how many blessings spring from (both prayer and fasting). For he who is praying as he ought, and fasting, has not many wants, and he who has not many wants cannot be covetous; he who is not covetous, will be also more disposed for almsgiving. He who fasts is light, and winged, and prays with wakefulness, and quenches his wicked lusts, and propitiates God, and humbles his soul when lifted up. Therefore even the Apostles were almost always fasting. He who prays with fasting has his wings double, and lighter than the very winds. For neither does he yawn or stretch himself or grow lazy in prayer as is the case with most men, but is more vehement than fire. Such a one is most especially an enemy to the evil spirits. Nothing is mightier than the man who prays sincerely.”

The hymns of the Church refer to the character of Matthew’s missionary journeys as follows:

⁴¹ Merrill Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, p. 346.

⁴² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LVII, 4.

“You utterly abandoned⁴³ the tumult of earthly things; for having hearkened to the voice of the incarnate Word, you were shown to be a steward and God-pleasing herald of His grace. As an eye-witness and servant of the shining Word of the pre-eternal Father, O Apostle, you went forth, proclaiming the glad tidings of His coming to all the nations”.

“With the trumpet of your words⁴⁴ you summoned men to the knowledge of God, O ever lauded one. Having driven the assemblies of the deceived from the earth, you guided the faithful to one unity of mind. Pray now that those who ever celebrate your honored memory with faith may be delivered from corruption and misfortunes”.

Matthew Begins His Missionary Journeys

To determine who went where on their missionary journeys, the Twelve had divided up the world into different regions, and then cast lots as to who went to which region⁴⁵. For example, Thomas’ lot was India and the Far East; John’s lot was Ephesus and Asia Minor; Andrew’s lot was Russia plus other areas and Matthew’s lot⁴⁶ was Ethiopia in Africa. The Church Historian, Socrates Scholasticus, also stated⁴⁷ that Matthew’s lot was Ethiopia, which extended into Central Africa. According to tradition⁴⁸, Matthew first traveled to Media and Parthia for a while. But little is known of his missionary journeys until the time of his death. Also some confusion exists in distinguishing between Matthew and Matthias due to the similarity of their names and due to the fact that they both went to Africa.

Clement of Alexandria referred⁴⁹ to some of the teachings current in his day regarding how Matthew proceeded in his missionary journeys.

“They say in the traditions that Matthew the apostle constantly said, that ‘if the neighbor of an elect man sin, the elect man has sinned. For had he conducted himself as the Word prescribes, his neighbor also would have been filled with such reverence for the life he led as not to sin’”. By “sin”, he is referring to a constant, habitual sin, as the Lord said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin” (John 8:34). This gives us a hint of the high standards that Matthew set in his missionary journeys.

John Chrysostom stated⁵⁰ that Matthew continued to style himself as a publican even in the days of his Apostleship (Matthew 10:3). He did this out of humility, owning up to the sins of his youth. In a similar manner, David cried out saying “My iniquities have gone over my head,

⁴³ “Ode I for Matins of the Commemoration of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew, August November 16th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁴⁴ “Stichera for Vespers of the Commemoration of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew, August November 16th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁴⁵ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, October 6, October 9, November 30.

⁴⁶ The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2003, November 16, p. 710.

⁴⁷ Socrates Scholasticus, Ecclesiastical History, I, 19.

⁴⁸ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, November 16.

The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2003, November 16, p. 710.

⁴⁹ Clement of Alexandria, The Stromata, VII, 13.

⁵⁰ John Chrysostom, Concerning the Power of Demons, I, 1.

and as a heavy burden have been burdensome to me” (Psalm 38:4). Isaiah also lamented, “I am unclean, and have unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5). The three children in the furnace of fire, confessed and said that they have sinned and transgressed, and have not kept the commandments of God⁵¹. Daniel again makes the same lamentation (Daniel 9:20-21).

As Matthew proceeded on his missionary journeys, he had no difficulty communicating with the various peoples he came in contact with. With the Gift of speaking in Tongues that he received at Pentecost, along with the rest of the 120 in the Upper Room, he was able to speak all the dialects of the Ethiopian language as well as other languages.

Matthew’s missionary journeys are commemorated in the hymns of the Church as follows:

“You were a divine image⁵² of the primal Effulgence, as a disciple set afire by His splendors. Chanting to Him, you said, ‘O all-hymned Lord and God of our fathers, blessed art Thou!’” As servant of the Word, O most blessed one, you made your abode in the divine mansions where Christ abides, as the one all-divine Lord and God of our fathers promised you. Infirmities are banished and a multitude of demons are forced to flee by the gifts of the divine Spirit which are in you; wherein you did chant, O all-hymned Lord and God of our fathers, blessed art Thou!”

“You received the tree of life⁵³ as is meet, O preacher of the living God, having spread the glad tidings of life, the visitation of God to the world. For you did not permit your mind to become corrupt through the tree of knowledge, remaining an unshaken and immovable foundation of the Church, O most blessed one”.

Matthew Gets Help From the Ethiopian Eunuch

In Matthew’s days, there was a large Jewish population in (black) Ethiopia, that (still) traces its roots to the Queen of Sheba of Solomon’s time (1 Kings 10:1-10). People came from Ethiopia to Jerusalem regularly in obedience to the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 16:16), just as people were in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost from very remote areas (Acts 2:8-11). From Luke’s record in Acts, we see that Matthew had some advance help in Ethiopia from an unlikely source. This came as the Deacon Philip was traveling the desert road from Jerusalem to Gaza, where he met an Ethiopian eunuch who had come to Jerusalem to worship, and who was on his way home⁵⁴. The eunuch had great authority, reporting directly to the Queen of Ethiopia⁵⁵, and had charge of all her treasury (Acts 8:27-28).

John Chrysostom noted⁵⁶ that even though he resided in Ethiopia and was beset with so much business, he came “to Jerusalem to worship” even when there was no festival going on.

⁵¹ Septuagint Old Testament, Song of the Three Children, I:4-6.

⁵² “Ode VII for Matins of the Commemoration of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew, August November 16th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁵³ “Ode IX for Matins of the Commemoration of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew, August November 16th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁵⁴ His home was in Upper Nubia, South of the present Nubian Desert.

⁵⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XIX, stated that in Ethiopia women were the rulers, and this was the law among them.

⁵⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XIX.

Great also is his studiousness, “sitting in his chariot, reading”, and that in the most violent heat of the day. And “the Spirit said to Philip, go and join yourself to this chariot. And Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ And he said, ‘How can I, except some man should guide me?’” (Acts 8: 29-31) Observe his piety; though he did not understand, he read, and then after reading, he examined.

Chrysostom noted⁵⁷ the lack of haughtiness of the eunuch. He was riding in a chariot and had servants to do the driving while he read from the scroll. This was obviously not a war chariot with spiked wheels, but a royal chariot such as was used by the Queen. Philip, on the other hand, was on foot, and would rank socially somewhere below the eunuch’s servants. When Philip spoke to the eunuch, the eunuch did not respond by saying, “Who are you?” The eunuch instead invited Philip to come up into the chariot to sit with him. He confessed his ignorance and showed his hurt to the physician. Philip, running alongside the chariot, showed that he had something to say, but yet he did it in a way that was very respectful to the dignity of the eunuch. The eunuch recognized the Grace of God in Philip, and did not *order* Philip to baptize him, but requested baptism from a lowly servant.

The eunuch was reading from Isaiah 53:7-8, which is a prophecy about the Crucifixion of Christ, which had just occurred in Jerusalem a little over a year earlier. Philip explained to him the significance of what he had been reading. Chrysostom commented, “Observe how it is Providentially ordered. First he reads and does not understand; then he reads the very text in which was the Passion and the Resurrection and the Gift”. After the baptism, when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away and translated him to Azotus (about 20 miles away). The eunuch, impressed out of his socks, went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:32-40). This was done in order that the occurrence might be shown to be of God; that the eunuch might not consider it to be merely man.

Luke doesn’t mention whether the eunuch received the Gift of speaking in Tongues when he came up out of the water, but this is a possibility. The eunuch certainly wasn’t quiet about his experience when he returned home.

Chrysostom stated⁵⁸ that it was expedient that the Spirit caught Philip away; otherwise the eunuch would have desired to go with him, and Philip would have grieved him by declining to comply with his request; the time being not yet come. But at the same time here was an encouraging assurance for them that they shall also prevail over the heathen. For indeed the high character of the first believers was enough to move them. If the eunuch had stayed there, how could you fault him?

Chrysostom also noted⁵⁹ how angels assisted the preaching, not themselves preaching, but calling the Apostles to the work. But the wonderful nature of the occurrence is shown also by this: that what of old was rare, and hardly done⁶⁰, here takes place with ease, and see with what frequency! The angel directed Philip in bodily matters to go to the desert road, but the Holy Spirit directed him in spiritual matters to begin speaking to the eunuch (Acts 8:26, 29).

⁵⁷ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XIX, v. 30.

⁵⁸ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XIX, v. 40.

⁵⁹ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XIX, Recapitulation.

⁶⁰ Chrysostom is referring to angelic manifestations. For another occasion when the Word of the Lord was rare, see 1 Samuel 3:1.

With the conversion of the eunuch, a seed was planted in Ethiopia. A few years later, the Apostle Matthew came to Ethiopia, speaking the Ethiopian language, healing the sick and raising the dead, like the other Apostles. As Matthew moved about in Ethiopia, he had to deal with the cannibals in that area also, including those who had grossly disfigured their faces.

Matthew Returns to Jerusalem for the Funeral of the Virgin Mary

Matthew was busy on his missionary journeys in Ethiopia just prior to the time of the death of the Virgin Mary in c. 55 AD. As Mary reached her mid 70's, she was feeling the effects of old age. And it was then that the Archangel Gabriel appeared to her to tell her that her departure was imminent⁶¹, and would occur in three days.

Shortly after Gabriel left, the Apostle John was translated in a bright cloud from wherever he was at the time. This was similar to the way the Deacon Philip was translated from the desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza to Azotus (Acts 8:26, 39-40), and as Habakkuk the prophet carried food to Daniel, who was in the lions' den, and quickly returned to Judaea⁶². There is some disagreement among the Church Fathers as to whether John was in Ephesus or in some region of Judea. They contend that John did not leave the Virgin Mary alone during her lifetime, unless it was just briefly in the care of her stepson, James, the Lord's brother.

After John arrived⁶³, "the rest of the Twelve arrived also from whatever part of the world where they were then preaching the Gospel. All of the Twelve arrived except Thomas. They stood and went in, and greeted the queen mother with the following words: 'Hail, Mary, full of grace! The Lord be with you' (Luke 1:28). And she eagerly rose quickly, and bowed herself, and kissed them, and gave thanks to God. And Peter answered and said to the apostles, 'Let us each, according to what the Holy Spirit announced and commanded us, give full information to the mother of our Lord'. And those who had come likewise agreed to give an account of how they had come. So each of the Twelve gave Mary an account of where they were when they were summoned". "And Matthew also answered⁶⁴ and said, 'I have glorified and do glorify God, because when I was in a boat and overtaken by a storm, the sea raging with its waves, on a sudden a cloud of light overshadowing the stormy billow, changed it to a calm, and having snatched me up, set me down beside you'".

"Then the blessed Mary said to her brethren: 'What is this, that you have all come to Jerusalem?' Peter, answering, said to her: 'We had need to ask this of you. Certainly, as I think, none of us knows why we have come here today with such rapidity. And they all wondered that they were there when they heard these things. The blessed Mary said to them: 'I asked my Son, before He endured the passion, that He and you should be at my death; and He granted me this gift. Whence you may know that my departure will be tomorrow'".

⁶¹ Roberts and Donaldson, "The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary", Ante-Nicene Fathers, v.8.

Roberts and Donaldson, "The Passing of Mary", Ante-Nicene Fathers, v.8.

⁶² Lancelot C. L. Brenton, "Bel and the Dragon 1:33-39", The Septuagint with Apocrypha, Hendrickson, Peabody MA, 1990

⁶³ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., "The Passing of Mary, First Latin Form", Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁶⁴ Roberts and Donaldson, "The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary", Ante-Nicene Fathers, v.8.

“After Mary’s death the next day, the Apostles with great honor laid the body in a tomb on the Mount of Olives, then Thomas was suddenly brought to the Mount of Olives, like the others had been brought earlier. He saw Mary’s body going up to heaven, and began to cry out to her. Then the belt with which the Apostles had encircled her body was thrown down from heaven to the blessed Thomas. And taking it, and giving thanks to God, he came again into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, finding all the Apostles and a great crowd there. Then Thomas said, ‘Where have you laid her body?’ And they pointed out the sepulcher with their finger. And he said, ‘The body is not there’. But they didn’t believe Thomas. Then they went to the sepulcher, which was a new one hollowed out in the rock, and took up the stone; but they did not find the body, and did not know what to say. Then Thomas told them how he was singing mass in India — he still had on his sacerdotal robes. He, not knowing the word of God, had been brought to the Mount of Olives, and saw the body of the blessed Mary going up into heaven, and prayed her to give him a blessing. She heard his prayer, and threw him her belt, which she had about her. And the Apostles seeing the belt which they had put about her, glorified God, on account of the benediction which the blessed Mary had given him, and because he had seen her body going up into heaven. Then Thomas gave them his benediction, and said, ‘Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!’”

“And the same cloud⁶⁵ by which they had been brought carried them back each to his own place. And so also the Apostles quickly returned to where they had at first been, to preach to the people of God”.

The Martyrdom of Matthew

Abridged accounts of Matthew’s martyrdom in Ethiopia are found in several traditional sources⁶⁶. The account presented here⁶⁷ comes from one of the New Testament Apocryphal sources for more details of the events.

Toward the end of his life, Matthew was resting in a desert-like mountain during a time of prayer and fasting. There was no water nearby and his only food at that time was any fruit that had fallen because of the movement of the winds. While there, he had a vision from the Lord to go to the nearby city of Mryna⁶⁸, the city of the man-eaters, and to plant a rod that was given to him by the gate of the Church that he had founded. The rod, Matthew was told, would grow into a tree, great and lofty and with many branches, and its branches would extend to thirty cubits. And of each single branch the fruit would be different both to the sight and the eating, and from the top of the tree would flow down much honey; and from its root there would come forth a great fountain, giving drink to this country round about. And in it the man-eaters would wash themselves, and eat of the fruit of the trees, of the vine and of the honey; and their bodies would be

⁶⁵ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “The Passing of Mary, First Latin Form”, *Apocrypha of the New Testament*, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁶⁶ Nickolai Velimirovic, *Prologue From Ochrid*, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, November 16.
Isaac Lambertsen, *The Lives of the Holy Apostles*, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, 1990, pp. 169.
The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2003, November 16.

⁶⁷ Roberts and Donaldson, “Acts and Martyrdom of St. Matthew the Apostle”, *Apocrypha of the New Testament*, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁶⁸ Also called Mirmena.

changed, and their forms would be altered so as to be like those of other men. And they would be ashamed of the nakedness of their body, and they would put on clothing of the rams of the sheep, and they would no longer eat unclean things. And there would be fire in abundance, preparing the sacrifices for offerings, and they would bake their bread with fire. And they would see each other in the likeness of the rest of men, and they would acknowledge Christ, and glorify His Father who is in the heavens.

Also in the vision, Matthew received word that his departure from the body through fire was at hand, and that he would receive the crown of his endurance.

And Matthew went down from the mountain, hastening to the city. And as he was about to enter into the city, there met him Fulvana, the wife of the king, and his son Fulvanus and his wife Erva, who were possessed by an unclean spirit. They cried out shouting, 'Who has brought you here again, Matthew? Or who has given you the rod for our destruction? For we see also Jesus, the Son of God, who is with you. Do not go then, O Matthew, to plant the rod for the food, and for the transformation of the man-eaters; for I have found what I shall do to you. For since you did drive me out of this city, and prevent me from fulfilling my wishes among the man-eaters, behold, I will raise up against you the king of this city, and he will burn you alive. And Matthew, having laid his hands on each one of the demoniacs, put the demons to flight, and made the people whole; and they followed him.

Plato the bishop, having heard of the presence of the Apostle Matthew, met him with all the clergy, and Matthew went with them into the church. And Matthew, having come out to the gate of the church, stood upon a certain lofty stone; and when the whole city ran together, especially the brethren who had believed, began to speak to them. 'Men and women, you have believed in the universe, but now know Him who has upheld and made the universe. You have worshipping the Satyr, and have been mocked by ten thousand false gods, but now through Jesus Christ acknowledge the one and only God, Lord and Judge. You have laid aside the immeasurable greatness of evil, and put on love, which is of like nature with affection towards men. You were once strangers to Christ, but now confess Him Lord and God. You were formerly without form, but are now transformed through Christ. Behold, the staff which you see in my hand. I shall plant this rod in this place, and it shall be a sign to your generations, and it shall become a tree, great and lofty and flourishing, and its fruit beautiful to the view and good to the sight; and the fragrance of perfumes shall come forth from it. And there shall be a vine twining round it, full of clusters; and from the top of it

honey coming down. And a fountain of water shall come forth from the root of it, giving drink to all the country round about.

And having said this, and called upon the name of the Lord Jesus, he fixed his rod in the ground. Immediately it sprang up to one cubit; and the sight was strange and wonderful. For the rod shot up, increased in size, and grew into a great tree, as Matthew had said. And the apostle said, 'Go into the fountain and wash your bodies in it, and then partake both of the fruits of the tree, and of the vine and the honey, and drink of the fountain, and you shall be transformed in your likeness to that of men. And after that, having gone into the church, you will clearly recognize that you have believed in the living and true God. And having done all these things, they saw themselves changed; then, having thus gone into the church, they worshipped and glorified God. And when they had been changed, they knew that they were naked; and they ran in haste each to his own house to cover their nakedness, because they were ashamed.

And Matthew and Plato remained in the church spending the night, and glorifying God. And there remained also the king's wife, and his son and his wife, and they prayed the apostle to give them the seal in Christ. And Matthew gave orders to Plato; and he, having gone forth, baptized them in the water of the fountain of the tree, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Thereafter, having gone into the church, they communicated in the holy mysteries of Christ. And they exulted and passed the night, along with many others who came with them; and all in the church sang the whole night, glorifying God.

And when dawn had come, Matthew and the bishop Plato stood in the place in which the rod had been planted, and he saw the rod grown into a great tree. And near it a vine twined round it, and honey coming down from above even to its root; and that tree was at once beautiful and flourishing, like the plants in paradise. And a river proceeded from its root watering all the land of the city of Myrna. And all ran together, and ate of the fruit of the tree and the vine, just as any one wished.

And when what had come to pass was reported in the palace, king Fulvanus⁶⁹, having learned what had been done by Matthew about his wife, and his son, and his daughter-in-law, rejoiced for a time at their purification. But seeing that they were inseparable from Matthew, he was seized with rage and anger, and endeavored to put him to death by fire. And on that night in which the king intended to lay hands on Matthew, Matthew had a vision of Jesus saying to him, 'I am with you always to save you, Matthew; be strong, and be a man'.

⁶⁹ Also referred to as Fulvian.

And the blessed Matthew, awoke, sealed himself over all the body, rose up and proceeded into the church; and having bent his knees, prayed earnestly. Then the bishop having come, and the clergy, they stood in common in prayer, glorifying God. And after they had ended the prayer, and they had sat down, the apostle said to the bishop Plato, and to all the clergy, 'I wish you, children, to know that the king of this city is going to send soldiers against me, the devil having entered into him, and armed him against us. But let us give ourselves up to Jesus, and He will deliver us from every trial, and all who have believed in Him'.

And the king, plotted against Matthew how he should lay hands on him, and seeing also that the believers were very many, was in great difficulty.

Therefore the wicked and unclean demon, who had come forth from the king's wife, and his son, and his daughter-in-law, transformed himself into the likeness of a soldier, and stood before the king. And he said to him, 'O king, why are you put out by this stranger and sorcerer? Do you not know that he was a publican, but now he has been called an apostle by Jesus, who was crucified by the Jews? For behold, your wife, and your son, and your daughter-in-law, instructed by him, have believed in him, and along with him sing in the church. And now Matthew is going forth, and Plato with him, and they are going to the gate called Heavy. But hurry and you will find them, and you shall do to him all that may be pleasing in your eyes.

The king having heard this, sent four soldiers against Matthew, having threatened them, and said, 'Unless you bring Matthew to me, I shall burn you alive with fire; and the punishment which he is to undergo, you shall endure'. And the soldiers went in arms to where the Apostle Matthew and the bishop Plato were. And when they came near them, they heard them speaking indeed, but saw no one. And having returned, they said to the king, 'We pray you, O king, we went and found no one, but only heard the voices of them talking'. And the king, being enraged, and having blazed up like fire, gave orders to send another ten soldiers — man-eaters — saying to them, 'Go stealthily to the place, and tear them in pieces alive, and eat up Matthew, and Plato, who is with him'. And when they were about to come near Matthew, they had a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ, holding a torch of fire that burned out their eyes. Having cried out and thrown down their arms, they fled and came to the king, and were speechless.

And the demon who had before appeared to the king in the form of a soldier, again stood before the king, and said to him, 'You see, O king, this stranger has bewitched them all. Learn, then, how you shall take him. The king said to him,

'Tell me first where his strength is, that I may know, and then I will draw up against him with a great force'. And the demon, compelled by an angel, said to the king, 'Since you wish to hear accurately about him, O king, I will tell you all the truth. Unless he shall be willing to be taken by you of his own accord, you labor in vain, and you will not be able to hurt him. But if you wish to lay hands on him, you will be struck by him with blindness, and you will be paralyzed. And if you send a multitude of soldiers against him, they also will be struck with blindness, and will be paralyzed. And we, seven unclean demons, shall go and immediately make away with you and your whole camp, and destroy all the city with lightning, except those naming that name of Christ. For wherever a footstep of theirs has come, we flee. And even if you shall apply fire to him, to him the fire will be dew. And if you shall shut him up in a furnace, to him the furnace will be a church. And if you shall put him in chains in prison, and seal up the floors, the doors will open to him of their own accord. And all who believe in that name will go in and say, 'This prison is a church of the living God, and a holy habitation of those that live alone'. Behold, O king, I have told you all the truth'. The king therefore said to the pretended soldier, 'Since I do not know Matthew, come with me, and point him out to me from a distance, and take from me gold, as much as you may wish, or go yourself, and with your sword kill him, and Plato his associate'. The demon said to him, 'I cannot kill him. I dare not even look into his face, seeing that he has destroyed all our generation through the name of Christ, proclaimed through him'.

The king said to him, 'And who are you?' And he said, 'I am the demon who dwelt in your wife, and in your son, and in your daughter-in-law; and my name is Asmodaeus; and this Matthew drove me out of them. And now, behold, your wife, and your son, and your daughter-in-law sing along with him in the church. And I know, O king, that you also after this will believe in him'. The king said to him, 'Whoever you are, spirit of many shapes, I adjure you by the God whom Matthew proclaims, get out of here without doing harm to any one'. And immediately the demon, no longer like a soldier, but like smoke, became invisible; and fled.

Then the king, affected with great fear at the answer of the demon, remained quiet that day. And the night having come, and he was not able to sleep, leaped up at dawn, and went into the church, with only two soldiers without arms, to take Matthew by craft, that he might kill him. And having summoned two friends of Matthew, he said to them, 'Show to Matthew that I wish to be his disciple'. And Matthew hearing, and knowing the craft of the tyrant, and having been warned also by the vision of the Lord to him, went forth out of the church, led by the hand by Plato, and stood in the gate of the church. And they said to the king, 'Behold Matthew in the gate!' And he said, 'Who he is, or where he is, I see not'. And they said to him, 'Behold, he is in front of you'. And he said, 'All the while

I see nobody'. For he had been blinded by the power of God. And he began to cry out, 'Woe to me! What evil has come upon me, for my eyes have been blinded, and all my limbs paralyzed? O Asmodaeus! All that you have said to me has come upon me. But I pray you, Matthew, servant of God, forgive me as the herald of the good God; for assuredly the Jesus proclaimed by you three days ago through the night appeared to me altogether resplendent as with lightning, like a beautiful young man. He said to me, 'Since you are entertaining evil counsels in the wickedness of your heart in regard to my servant Matthew, know I have disclosed to him that through you will be the release of his body'. And immediately I saw him going up into heaven. If therefore He is your God, and if He wishes your body to be buried in our city for a testimony of the salvation of the generations after this, and for the banishing of the demons, I shall know the truth for myself by this, by you laying on hands upon me, and I shall receive my sight'. And the apostle having laid his hands upon his eyes, he made him receive his sight instantly.

And immediately the king, laying hold of the apostle, and leading him by the right hand, brought him by craft into the palace; and Plato was on Matthew's left hand, going along with him. Then Matthew said, 'O crafty tyrant, how long before you fulfill the works of your father the devil? And he was enraged at what had been said; for he perceived that the king would inflict upon him a more bitter death. For he resolved to put him to death by fire. And the king commanded several executioners to come, and to lead him away to the place by the seashore, where the execution of malefactors took place, saying to the executioners, 'I hear that the God whom he proclaims delivers from fire those who believe in him'. Having laid him, therefore, on the ground on his back, they stretched him out, pierced his hands and feet with iron nails, and covered him over with paper, having smeared it with dolphins' oil, and covered him up with brimstone and asphalt and pitch, and put brushwood above. Thus apply the fire to him; and if any of the same tribe with him rise up against you, he shall get the same punishment.

And the apostle exhorted the brethren to remain undismayed, and that they should rejoice, and accompany him with great meekness, singing and praising God. Having therefore come to the place, the executioners, like most evil wild beasts, pinned down to the ground Matthew's hands and feet with long nails; and having done everything as they had been bid, applied the fire. And they indeed labored closely, kindling it all round; but all the fire was changed into dew, so that the brethren, rejoicing, cried out, 'The only God is the Christians', who assists Matthew, in whom we have believed. The only God is the Christians', who preserves His own apostle in the fire'. And by their voice the city was shaken. And some of the executioners, having gone forth, said to the king, 'We indeed, O king, by every contrivance of vengeance, have kindled the fire; but the sorcerer by a

certain name puts it out, calling upon Christ, and invoking his cross. And the Christians surrounding him play with the fire, and walking in it with naked feet, laugh at us, and we have fled ashamed.

Then he ordered a multitude to carry coals of fire from the furnace of the bath in the palace, and the twelve gods of gold and silver; and to place them in a circle round the sorcerer, lest he may even somehow bewitch the fire from the furnace of the palace. And there being many executioners and soldiers, some carried the coals; and others, bearing the gods, brought them. And the king accompanied them, watching lest any of the Christians should steal one of his gods, or bewitch the fire. And when they came near the place where the apostle was nailed down, his face was looking towards heaven, and all his body was covered over with the paper, and much brushwood over his body to the height of ten cubits. And he ordered the soldiers to set the gods in a circle round Matthew, five cubits away, securely fastened that they might not fall. Again he ordered the coal to be thrown on, and to kindle the fire at all points.

And Matthew, having looked up to heaven, cried out, 'O God the Father, O Lord Jesus Christ, deliver me, and burn down their gods which they worship. And let the fire also pursue the king even to his palace, but not to his destruction, for perhaps he will repent and be converted'. And when he saw the fire to be monstrous in height, the king, thinking that Matthew was burnt up, laughed aloud, and said, 'Has your magic been of any avail to you, Matthew? Can your Jesus now give you any help?'

And as he said this a dreadful wonder appeared. All the fire along with the wood went away from Matthew, and was poured round about their gods, so that nothing of the gold or the silver was any more seen. And the king fled, and said, 'Woe is me! My gods are destroyed by the rebuke of Matthew, of which the weight was a thousand talents⁷⁰ of gold and a thousand talents of silver. Better are the gods of stone and of earthenware, in that they are neither melted nor stolen.

And when the fire had thus utterly destroyed their gods, and burnt up many soldiers, there came to pass another stranger wonder. For the fire, in the likeness of a great and dreadful dragon, chased the tyrant as far as the palace, and ran here and there round the king, not letting him go into the palace. And the king, chased by the fire, and not allowed to go into his palace, turned back to where Matthew was, and cried out, saying, 'I beseech you, O Matthew, whom so great a pyre has not touched, remove from me this dreadful and fiery dragon. Forget the evil I have done, as also when you made me receive my sight. And Matthew, having rebuked the fire, and the flames having been extinguished, and the dragon

⁷⁰ 1000 talents was about 75,000 pounds.

having become invisible, stretching his eyes to heaven, and praying in Hebrew, and commending his spirit to the Lord, said, 'Peace to you!' And having glorified the Lord, he went to his rest about the sixth hour.

Then the king, having ordered more soldiers to come, and the bed to be brought from the palace, which had a great show of gold, he ordered the apostle to be laid on it, and carried to the palace. And the body of the apostle was lying as if in sleep, and his robe and his tunic unstained by the fire; and sometimes they saw him on the bed, and sometimes following, and sometimes going before the bed, and with his right hand put upon Plato's head, and singing along with the multitude, so that both the king and the soldiers, with the crowd, were struck with astonishment. And many diseased persons and demoniacs, having only touched the bed, were made sound; and as many as were savage in appearance, in that same hour were changed into the likeness of other men.

And as the bed was going into the palace, we all saw Matthew rising up, as it were, from the bed, and going into heaven, and twelve men in shining garments came to meet him, having golden crowns on their head; and we saw how in a flash of lightning they went away to heaven.

And the king stood at the gate of the palace, and ordered that no one should come in but the soldiers carrying the bed. And having shut the doors, he ordered an iron coffin to be made, put the body of Matthew into it, and sealed it up with lead. Through the eastern gate of the palace at midnight, he put it into a boat, no one knowing of it, and threw it into the deep part of the sea.

And through the whole night the brethren remained before the gate of the palace, spending the night, and singing; and when the dawn rose there was a voice, 'O bishop Plato, carry the Gospel and the Psalter of David. Go along with the multitude of the brethren to the east of the palace, and sing the Alleluia, and read the Gospel, and bring as an offering the holy bread. And having pressed three clusters from the vine into a cup, communicate with me, as the Lord Jesus showed us how to offer up when He rose from the dead on the third day'.

And the bishop ran into the church, and took the Gospel and the Psalter of David, assembled the presbyters and the multitude of the brethren, and came to the east of the palace at the hour of sunrise. And having ordered the one who was singing to go upon a certain lofty stone, he began to praise in singing of a song to God, 'Precious in the sight of God is the death of His saints' (Psalm 116:15). And again, 'I laid me down and slept; I arose: because the Lord will sustain me' (Psalm 3:5 LXX). And they listened to the singing of a song of David⁷¹, 'Shall he that is dead not rise again? Now I shall raise him up for myself', saith the Lord. And all shouted out the Alleluia. And the bishop read the Gospel, and all cried out, 'Glory to You, You who have been glorified in heaven and on earth'. And so then they offered the gift of the holy offering for Matthew; and having partaken for thanksgiving of the undefiled and life-giving mysteries of Christ⁷², they all glorified God. And it was about the sixth hour, and Plato saw the sea opposite about seven furlongs off; and, behold, Matthew was standing on the sea, and two men, one on each side, in shining garments. And all the brethren saw these things, and they heard them saying 'Amen, Alleluia'. And one could see the sea fixed like a stone of crystal, when out of the depth of the sea a cross came up, and at the end of the cross the coffin going up

⁷¹ The Psalm referred to here is not certain.

⁷² That is, the Eucharist.

in which was the body of Matthew. And in the hour of the piercing on the cross, the coffin was placed on the ground, behind the palace towards the east, where the bishop had offered the offering for Matthew.

And the king having seen these things from the upper part of the house, and being terror-struck, went forth from the palace, and ran and worshipped towards the east at the coffin, and fell down before the bishop, and the presbyters, and the deacons, in repentance and confession, saying: Truly I believe in the true God, Christ Jesus. I entreat, give me the seal in Christ, and I will give you my palace, in testimony of Matthew, and you shall put the coffin upon my golden bed, in the great dining-room; only, having baptized me in it, communicate to me the Eucharist of Christ. And the bishop having prayed, and ordered him to take off his clothes, and having examined him for a long time, and he having confessed and wept over what he had done, having sealed him, and anointed him with oil, put him down into the sea, in the name of Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost. And when he came up from the water he ordered him to put on himself splendid garments, and so then having given praise and thanks, communicating the holy bread and mixed cup, the bishop first gave them to the king, saying: Let this body of Christ, and this cup, His blood shed for us, be to you for the remission of sins unto life. And a voice was heard from on high: Amen, amen, amen. And when he had thus communicated in fear and joy, the apostle appeared and said: King Fulvanus, your name shall no longer be Fulvanus; but you shall be called Matthew. And you, the son of the king, shall no longer be called Fulvanus, but Matthew also; and you Ziphagia, the wife of the king, shall be called Sophia; and Erva, the wife of your son, shall be called Synesis. And these names of yours shall be written in the heavens, and there shall not fail of your loins from generation to generation. And in that same hour Matthew appointed the king a presbyter, and he was thirty-seven years old; and the king's son he appointed deacon, being seventeen years old; and the king's wife he appointed a presbyteress; and his son's wife he appointed a deaconess, and she also was seventeen years old. And then he thus blessed them, saying: The blessing and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ shall be with you to time everlasting.

Then the king, having awakened out of sleep, and rejoiced with all his house at the vision of the holy Apostle Matthew, praised God.

And the king, having gone into his palace, broke all the idols to pieces, and gave a decree to those in his kingdom, writing thus: King Matthew, to all those under my kingdom, greeting. Christ having appeared upon earth, and having saved the human race, the so-called gods have been found to be deceivers, and soul-destroyers, and plotters against the human race. Whence, divine grace having shone abroad, and come even to us, and we having come to the knowledge of the deception of the idols, that it is vain and false, it has seemed good to our divinity that there should not be many gods, but one, and one only, the God in the heavens. And you, having received this our decree, keep to the purport of it, and break to pieces and destroy every idol; and if anyone shall be detected from this time forth serving idols, or concealing them, let such an one be subjected to punishment by the sword. Farewell all, because we also are well. And when this order was given out, all, rejoicing and exulting, broke their idols to pieces, crying out and saying: There is one only God, He who is in the heavens, who does good to men.

And after all these things had come to pass, Matthew the apostle of Christ appeared to the bishop Plato, and said to him: Plato, servant of God, and our brother, be it known unto you, that after three years shall be your rest in the Lord, and exultation to ages of ages. And the king

himself, whom after my own name I have called Matthew, shall receive the throne of your bishopric, and after him his son. And he, having said Peace to you and all the saints, went to heaven.

And after three years the bishop Plato rested in the Lord. And King Matthew succeeded him, having given up his kingdom willingly to another, whence there was given him grace against unclean demons, and he cured every affliction. And he advanced his son to be a presbyter, and made him second to himself.

And Saint Matthew finished his course in the country of the man-eaters, in the city of Myrna, on the sixteenth of the month of November, our Lord Jesus Christ reigning, to whom be glory and strength, now and ever, and to ages of ages. Amen.

The hymns of the Church remember the ministry and the martyrdom of Matthew as follows:

“You shone forth⁷³, O Apostle, as luminous as the sun, with the rays of the Spirit, and have illumined the whole world with the knowledge of God, O blessed one. And you have dispelled the gloom of polytheism, O most wise Matthew. Wherefore we celebrate today your all-radiant and right wondrous solemnity as a well-spring of sanctification”.

“Seated on the heights of divine knowledge, O Apostle, you received the effulgence of the Spirit, which appeared to you in the guise of a tongue of fire. And you did manifestly consume all the tinder of the impiety of ungodliness. Wherefore we honor you as an Apostle and herald of God, celebrating your holy festival today”.

“You thundered forth sacred and saving teachings unto the whole world, O most wise Matthew. You have cleansed all creation of the madness of idolatry, and illumined the people with the splendors of the Gospel. Having destroyed the pagan temples by means of grace, you raised up Churches to the glory of God”.

“Having armed⁷⁴ the most valiant Matthew with Your armor, O Savior, You made him mightier than the tormentors and showed him to be the destroyer of the deception of idolatry, O Master Who loves mankind”.

“The sound of your fiery tongue consumed the temples of the demons, O divinely inspired Matthew. You are an instrument of the Comforter, through whom Christ, the hypostatic Life of all, is proclaimed”.

⁷³ “Ode IX for Matins of the Commemoration of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew, August November 16th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

⁷⁴ “Ode III for Matins of the Commemoration of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew, August November 16th”, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

The Epistle Lesson for the Apostles: 1 Corinthians 4:9-16

The Epistle lesson is not used at all in the Western lectionary. In the Orthodox lectionary, the Epistle lesson is also used for the Feast Days of many of the Twelve Apostles as follows:

Name	Calling
Andrew	Of the Twelve Apostles
James, son of Alphaeus	Of the Twelve Apostles
Matthew	Of the Twelve Apostles
Philip	Of the Twelve Apostles
Simon the Zealot	Of the Twelve Apostles
Thomas	Of the Twelve Apostles
Simeon	Of the Seventy, 2 nd Bishop of Jerusalem

The message of this Epistle Reading is that the Twelve Apostles have been exhibited as a spectacle of the ways of God. “For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men” (1 Corinthians 4:9).

From the world’s point of view, there have been many people throughout the ages who think that the things they do in secret are hidden from the eyes of God. For example, murderers often think, “The Lord does not see” (Psalm 94:7), slanderers often say, “Who can see them?” (Psalm 64:2-6), and adulterers think that, “No eye will see me” because their activities are private and in the dark (Job 24:15). But yet Paul says that “there is no creature hidden from His sight but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13). Paul spoke of the Lord’s return when He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness (1 Corinthians 4:5) and judge the secrets of men (Romans 2:16). Thus everything we do – even the most private things – we do as it were in a fishbowl with many observers looking in.

The Spectacle of the Apostles in Their Work

Paul said, “For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men” (1 Corinthians 4:9). Why to angels? Table I is a brief summary of New Testament references to the function of angels; that is, a list of the things angels are recorded as doing.

One of the things angels do is witness human affairs and the working out of our salvation. Angels desire very much to look into the things the Prophets ministered (literally deaconed) to us, and into the evangelization of the Church by the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:12). For example, Paul cautioned the Hebrews not to forget to entertain strangers; they may be angels looking in on human affairs (Hebrews 13:2). Another example occurs when a sinner repents as a result of the Holy Spirit’s evangelism; there is joy in the presence of the angels (Luke 15:10). Recognizing this, Paul, when he set Timothy up as overseer (1 Timothy 5:21), charged him before God, the Lord Jesus and the angels (who look in) to do things right.

**TABLE I
WHAT ANGELS DO**

1. Surround Throne of God	Hebrews 12:22
2. Always see Face of the Father	Matthew 18:10
3. Witness Christ's confession of us	Mark 8:38, Luke 12:8-9; 9:26
4. Are subject to Christ	1 Peter 3:22
5. Are personal servants of Christ	Matthew 4:6, 11; 26:53, Mark 1:13, John 1:51
6. Passed Law on to men	Acts 7:53, Galatians 3:19
7. Sang praise to God at nativity	Luke 2:15
8. Don't judge anyone	2 Peter 2:11
9. Are witnesses to human affairs	Luke 15:10, 1 Corinthians 4:9, 1 Timothy 3:16; 5:21, Hebrews 13:2, 1 Peter 1:12
10. Guard Children	Matthew 18:10
11. Don't marry; we'll be like them	Matthew 22:30, Mark 12:25, Luke 20:34-36
12. Gather righteous at 2 nd Coming	Matthew 13:39-49; 16:27; 24:31; 25:31, Mark 13:27
13. Don't know time of 2 nd Coming	Matthew 24:36, Mark 13:32
14. Are judged by the righteous	1 Corinthians 6:3

Quoting an ancient hymn or creed, Paul referred to the mystery of godliness as having at least six parts (from 1 Timothy 3:16):

- The incarnation
- Justified in the Spirit (baptism and resurrection) see Matthew 3:16, Romans 1:4
- Seen by angels
- Preached among the Gentiles
- Believed on in the world
- Received up in glory

Most of us would see the incarnation, justification, preaching, believing and receiving as a much bigger deal than just being seen by angels. Perhaps that's because we're so focused on our own human affairs that we don't realize that we are in the fishbowl and they are all watching us.

John Chrysostom commented⁷⁵ that there is more to this than meets the eye, and that Paul was speaking of a very severe rule of life.

“There is a great depth of meaning and severity implied in (Paul's) saying...’us the Apostles’ who are enduring such innumerable ills, who are sowing the word of godliness, who are leading you to this severe rule of life. But what does ‘unto angels’ mean? It is possible to ‘become a spectacle unto men’, but not so to angels when the things done are ordinary. But our wrestling is such as to be worthy even of angelic contemplations”.

⁷⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XII, 6.

Paul said, “We *are* morons for Christ's sake, but you *are* wise in Christ! We *are* weak, but you *are* strong! You *are* distinguished, but we *are* dishonored! To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, we are poorly clothed, punched out, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things until now” (1 Corinthians 4:10-13).

So what is Paul doing that is worthy of angelic contemplation? He and others are:

- Morons because of Christ
- Weak or feeble
- Dishonored
- Hungry and thirsty
- Poorly clad
- Punched out (with the fist)
- Homeless
- Working with their hands
- Reviled
- Persecuted
- Defamed
- Refuse (lit. Pot scrubbing) of the world
- Off scouring (lit. floor sweepings) of all things

Yet Paul said that the Corinthians claimed to be:

- Wise in Christ
- Strong
- Held in Honor

Clement of Alexandria stated⁷⁶ that there is contempt for the Faith on the part of the multitude. As a result, Paul’s words are not appreciated and his work is not understood.

“To the multitude, the vain labor of stuffing themselves to satiety like cattle is desirable. But to us the apostle says, ‘Now we know this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin’ (Romans 6:6). Does not the apostle then plainly add the following, to show the contempt for faith in the case of the multitude? ‘For I think that God has set forth us the apostles last, as appointed to death we are made a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men. Up to this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are beaten, and are feeble, and labor, working with our hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat; we are become as it were the off scouring of the world’ (1 Corinthians 4:9-13). Such also are the words of Plato in the *Republic*: ‘The just man, though stretched on the rack, though his eyes are dug out, will be happy’”.

Tertullian stated⁷⁷ that the “spectacle to the world” does not refer to just unbelievers but to both men and angels, both of whom have work to do in the world.

⁷⁶ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, IV, 7.

⁷⁷ Tertullian, *Five Book Against Marcion*, II, ii, v, 7.

“He has promised Christ to be a Light, and He has declared Himself to be a lamp, ‘searching the hearts and reins’ (Psalm 7:9 LXX). From Him also shall ‘praise be had by every man’ (1 Corinthians 4:5); from Him proceeds also, as from a judge, the opposite of praise. You say he interprets the world to be the God thereof, when he says, ‘We are made a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men’ (1 Corinthians 4:9). If by world he had meant the people, he would not have afterwards specially mentioned ‘*men*’. The Holy Spirit has providentially explained the meaning of the passage thus, ‘We are made a spectacle to the world’, *i.e.* ‘both to *angels*’, who minister therein, ‘and to *men*’, who are the objects of their ministration”.

Chrysostom stated⁷⁸ that Paul put it this way to shame them and was leading up to addressing the immoral man who had his father’s wife in the next chapter.

“How can it be that you should be wise and we fools in the things relating to Christ? Here he sets himself against the noble and those who plumed themselves upon external advantages. How can it be that the Apostles are beaten, despised, dishonored and esteemed as nothing, while the Corinthians enjoy honor and are looked up to by many as a wise and prudent kind of people? We (the Apostles) take no account of outward pomp, but we look to God only. This everyone needs to practice in every place. For not only are angels looking on, but even more than they: He that presides over the spectacle”.

“Let us not then desire any others to applaud us. For this is to insult Him; hurrying past Him, as if He were insufficient to admire us, we make our way quickly to our fellow servants. For just as they who contend in a small theatre seek a larger audience, as if this were insufficient for their display, so also do they. Contending in the sight of God, (they are not content); afterwards they seek the applause of men. Giving up the greater praise and eager for the lesser, they draw upon themselves severe punishment. This turns everything upside down”.

Chrysostom then went on to say⁷⁹ that if men were looking on, no one would choose to commit adultery and fornication. But yet in the sight of God, men not only commit adultery and fornication but other things also that are much more dreadful. When we commit uncleanness, we fear men more than God; we have thus subjected ourselves unto them and made them lords over us.

“There are many other things⁸⁰ also which seem to these our lords to be evil, but aren’t; these we flee for our part in like manner. For instance to live in poverty, many account disgraceful; and we flee poverty not because it is disgraceful nor because we are so persuaded, but because our masters count it to be disgraceful and we fear them. Again, to be un-honored and contemptible and void of all authority seems likewise to the most part a matter of great shame. This again we flee; not condemning the thing itself, but because of the sentence of our masters”.

“Again on the contrary side also, we undergo the same mischief. As wealth is counted a good thing, with pride and pomp, and to be conspicuous; accordingly this we pursue. Not from considering the nature of the things as

⁷⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XII, 6-7.

⁷⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XII, 7.

⁸⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XII, 8.

good, but persuaded by the opinion of our masters. This master is savage and a severe tyrant; not so much as a command being needed in order to make us listen to him. It is enough that we just know what he wills, and without a word we submit; so great a good will do we bear toward him. God may threaten and admonish day by day but we don't hear that. But the common people, our master, made up of all manner of the dregs of society, has no occasion for one word of command. Enough for it only to signify with what it is well pleased, and in all things we obey immediately”.

Our Imitation of the Apostles

Paul spoke to the Corinthians as a father, since he had founded the Church in Corinth. As a father desiring to correct his spiritual children, Paul could have returned to Corinth with a “rod” (1 Corinthians 4:21) to discipline them. But he preferred to come in a spirit of gentleness. As a father, he urged the Corinthians to imitate him (1 Corinthians 4:16) as an example, as we all imitate our parents.

Cyril of Jerusalem pointed out⁸¹ that it is not only a natural father who is called “father” in the Scriptures. Paul, Job, Christ and Joseph are all called a “father” for people other than their natural children.

“In the Divine Scriptures the natural father is not the only one called ‘father’. Paul was father of the Corinthians, not by having begotten them after the flesh, but by having taught and begotten them again after the Spirit (1 Corinthians 4:15). Hear Job also said, ‘I was a father of the needy’ (Job 29:16); for he called himself a father, not as having begotten them all, but as caring for them. And God’s Only-begotten Son Himself, when nailed in His flesh to the tree at the time of crucifixion, on seeing Mary, His own Mother according to the flesh, and John, the most beloved of His disciples, said to him, ‘Behold! your mother’, and to her, ‘Behold! your Son’ (John 19:26-27). He taught her the parental affection due to him, and indirectly explained that which is said in Luke, ‘and His father and His mother marveled at Him’ (Luke 2:33): words which the tribe of heretics snatches up, saying that He was begotten of a man and a woman. For as Mary was called the mother of John, because of her parental affection, not from having given him birth, so Joseph also was called the father of Christ, not from having begotten Him, but because of the care bestowed on His nurture”.

How do we imitate Paul and the other Apostles as the fathers of the Faith? By our strictness and dedication to the things of the Lord! If we can see ourselves as in a fishbowl, where the angels and the bodiless powers are constantly watching to see how we will do, we will gain a better perspective. To this end, tribulation may be helpful, even if it is very unpleasant.

John Chrysostom stated⁸² that tribulation is expedient for us, as we imitate the Master. If he took the path of affliction while we take the path of ease and comfort, it may be open to question whether we are on the same path.

“For a great, a truly great consolation are both the sufferings of Christ, and those of the Apostles. For He so well knew that this is the better way of virtue, as even to go that way Himself, not

⁸¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, VII, 9.

⁸² John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews*, XXVIII, 6.

having need thereof. He knew so well that tribulation is expedient for us, and that it becomes rather a foundation for repose. For hear Him saying, ‘If a man take not his cross, and follow after Me, he is not worthy of Me’ (Matthew 10:38). If you are a disciple, He means, imitate the Master, for this is to be a disciple. But if He went by the path of affliction and you go by that of ease, you no longer tread the same path, which He trod, but another. How then do you follow, when you don’t follow? How shall you be a disciple, not going after the Master? This Paul also says, ‘We are weak, but you are strong; we are despised, but you are honored’ (1 Corinthians 4:10). How is it reasonable, he means, that we should be striving after opposite things, and yet that you should be disciples and we teachers?”

Ambrose of Milan stated⁸³ that part of Paul’s humility in his persecution was his repentance for persecution of the Church. This was like plowing land in order to remove brambles and produce good fruit.

“Let us then not be ashamed to confess our sins unto the Lord. Shame indeed there is when each makes known his sins; but that shame, as it were, plows his land, removes the ever-recurring brambles, prunes the thorns, and gives life to the fruits which he believed were dead. Follow him who, by diligently plowing his field, sought for eternal fruit. ‘Being reviled we bless, being persecuted we endure, being defamed we entreat, we are made as the off scouring of the world’ (1 Corinthians 4:13). If you plow after this fashion you will sow spiritual seed. Plow that you may get rid of sin and gain fruit. Paul plowed so as to destroy in himself the last tendency to persecution of the Church. What more could Christ give to lead us on to the pursuit of perfection, than to convert and then give us for a teacher one who was a persecutor?”

Dionysius the Great of Alexandria gave⁸⁴ an example of how the saints of the 3rd century interpreted Paul’s words about seeking humility in the helping of others. By sacrificing themselves and their own comfort, they received the martyr’s crown.

“Certainly very many of our brethren, while, in their exceeding love and brotherly kindness, did not spare themselves, but kept by each other, and visited the sick without thought of their own peril. They ministered to them, and treated them for their healing in Christ; they died from time to time most joyfully along with them, bringing on themselves pains derived from others. They drew upon themselves their neighbors’ diseases, and willingly took over to their own persons the burden of the sufferings of those around them. And many who had thus cured others of their sicknesses, and restored them to strength, died themselves, having transferred to their own bodies the death that lay upon these. And that common saying, which otherwise seemed always to be only a polite form of address, they expressed in actual fact, as they departed this life, like the ‘off scouring of all’ (1 Corinthians 4: 13). The very best of our brethren have departed this life in this manner, including some presbyters and some deacons, and among the people those who were in highest reputation. Because of the distinguished piety and the steadfast faith, which were exhibited in it, this form of death appeared to come in nothing short of martyrdom itself”.

⁸³ Ambrose, *Two Books Concerning Repentance*, II, 5.

⁸⁴ Dionysius, “Epistle to the Alexandrians”, XII, 4, in *Extant Fragments*, VI.

The Problem in Corinth

The Corinthians had tolerated sexual immorality such as was not even named among the Gentiles (1 Corinthians 5:1). They had separated into cliques: some of Paul, some of Apollos, some of Peter, etc. (1 Corinthians 1:12). Paul could not speak to them as spiritual people but as fleshly people, who needed milk and not solid food (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). If the Corinthians thought they were wise in Christ, strong and held in honor, the question is, “Who says so?” Paul thought they were puffed up and was planning to come to see what power was behind their haughtiness (1 Corinthians 4:18-21). Paul’s aim was to get the Corinthians to imitate him (1 Corinthians 4:16) and focus on what God considers good rather than what their peers consider good.

To help them with this, Paul had sent Timothy (one of the Seventy who had been traveling with Paul for about seven years at this point) on ahead to remind them of Paul’s ways in Christ (1 Corinthians 4:17). While the Corinthians had become somewhat puffed up (1 Corinthians 4:18, 19; 5:2), they were unaware of their problem (which everyone outside the fishbowl could see). Paul was diligent to point this out as a loving father concerned for his children (1 Corinthians 4:14-15).

And this is what the Epistle lesson illustrates. The Twelve Apostles took a great deal of abuse in this life in being loving fathers concerned for their children. This can also be illustrated by the use of salt and saltiness to describe the work of the Twelve and those that followed them.

Salt and Saltiness:

Salt in ancient times was valuable and was an important commodity in trade. Besides seasoning food, it was also used to keep food from spoiling in the absence of refrigeration. In all the sacrifices offered to the Lord, salt had to be present (Leviticus 2:13). The significance of this was that nothing rotting or putrefying was to be offered to the Lord. And the Twelve left everything (Matthew 19:27) and offered their lives to the Lord as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1).

The recipient of the animal sacrifices (after they were offered) and of the tithe, were the priests and Levites. They had no inheritance and owned no land like the other twelve tribes since the Lord was their inheritance (Numbers 18:20-24). The term used to describe the priests’ and Levites’ portion was called a “covenant of salt” (Numbers 18:19; 2 Chronicles 13:5). In this aspect, salt took on the implication of unbending truthfulness and lack of corruption.

This has strong implications, especially as applied to the Apostles and Fathers of the Church. Matthew 5:13 reads literally, “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt becomes foolish (or moronic), by what shall it be salted? It has no longer strength for anything but to be thrown out and be trampled underfoot by men.” From the context as applied to Jesus’ disciples (and their followers as the pillars of the Faith), this verse has much to say.

John Chrysostom⁸⁵ commented on this exchange between the Lord and His disciples. We are not drawn to ordinary conflicts; we are the salt of the earth. We don’t turn rottenness into good things; Christ did that! We use our saltiness to preserve what is good.

⁸⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XV, 10.

“‘Think not then,’ He says, ‘that you are drawn on to ordinary conflicts, or that for some small matters you are to give account. You are the salt of the earth. When then; did they restore the decayed? By no means! For neither is it possible to do any good to that which is already spoiled, by sprinkling it with salt. This therefore they did not. But rather, what things had been before restored, and committed to their charge, and freed from that ill savor, these they then salted, maintaining and preserving them in that freshness, which they had received of the Lord. For that men should be set free from the rottenness of their sins was the good work of Christ; but not returning to it again any more was the object of these men’s diligence and travail. See how by degrees He indicates their superiority to the very prophets? In that He says they are teachers, not of Palestine, but of the whole world?’”

If the Apostles and Fathers of the Church (both in ancient times and in the present times) adhere to unbending truthfulness and are morally straight, the whole earth will tend in that direction also. If they don’t, they’re worse than useless. Salt that’s thrown out can’t be put where anything is growing (Luke 14:35) because it alters the pH of the soil (acid/alkali balance) and inhibits growth. (That’s why crops can’t be irrigated with seawater). The only place to put it is on roads or paths where nothing is supposed to grow.

Chrysostom continues⁸⁶ to say that if the Lord’s disciples don’t adhere to unbending truthfulness and righteousness, they will be trodden under foot. We need so much the greater diligence. It is not an evil report that you should fear, but lest you should prove partners in hypocrisy.

“Be not then impatient, as though my sayings were too burdensome. For while it is possible for others who have lost their savor to return by your means, you, if you should come to this, will with yourselves destroy others also. So that in proportion as the matters are great, which you have put into your hands, you need so much the greater diligence. For other men, though they fall never so often, may possibly obtain indulgence: but the teacher, should this happen to him, is deprived of all excuse, and will suffer the most extreme vengeance. Thus, lest at the words, ‘when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you,’ they should be too timid to go forth, He tells them, ‘unless you are prepared to combat with all this, you have been chosen in vain.’ For it is not an evil report that you should fear, but lest you should prove partners in hypocrisy. For then, ‘You will lose your savor, and be trodden under foot’. But if you continue sharply to brace them up, and then are evil spoken of, rejoice; for this is the very use of salt, to sting the corrupt, and make them smart. And so their censure follows of course, in no way harming you, but rather testifying your firmness. But if through fear of it you give up the earnestness that becomes you, you will have to suffer much more grievously, being both evil spoken of, and despised by all. For this is the meaning of trodden under foot”.

The Light of the World:

The salt of the earth is also the light of the world. One doesn’t light a lamp (i.e. an oil burning lamp) and put it under a basket; one puts it on a lamp stand. In Revelation 1:11-20 the seven Churches in Asia to whom the Apostle John addressed chapters 2 and 3 are referred to as

⁸⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XV, 10.

seven lamp stands. They were the light of that part of the world. Yet they each had something that they needed to repent of and correct. And if they didn't do so, John said that their lamp stand would be removed from its place (Revelation 2:5). These are the things that the Apostles and Church Fathers were very much involved with. Chrysostom pointed out⁸⁷ that they were to be the light of the world; not of one nation, not of twenty states, but of the whole inhabited earth.

A lamp set on a lamp stand, like a thriving Church in its own region of the world, is a city set on a hill (Matthew 5:14). It's not easy to hide a thriving Church because people see their good works and glorify our Father in Heaven (Matthew 5:16). Chrysostom wrote⁸⁸:

“Again, by these words He trains them to strictness of life, teaching them to be earnest in their endeavors, as set before the eyes of all men, and contending in the midst of the amphitheater of the world. ‘For look not to this,’ He says, ‘that we are now sitting here, that we are in a small portion of one corner. For you shall be as conspicuous to all as a city set on the ridge of a hill, as a candle in a house on the candlestick, giving light’”

⁸⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XV, 11.

⁸⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XV, 11.

Figure 1

FAMILY TREE OF JESUS

