

Matthew was a tax collector working for the occupying Roman government. There was no love lost between a tax collector and the general public. The Jewish people did not like paying taxes to a foreign government and they especially resented one of their own (Matthew who was Jewish) working for this occupying force.ⁱ

Jesus called Matthew to the vocation of an apostle. He left his livelihood to follow Jesus as a disciple. The Gospel scene is captured in a famous painting by the artist Caravaggioⁱⁱ who depicts Matthew as very surprised by the call. “You couldn’t possibly mean me. You must have the wrong man.” In the Gospel, the Pharisees and scribes are of the same mind. They chastise Jesus for his association with a despised sinner.

The painting of the artist shows a good deal of thought and prayer. If you study the hand of Jesus pointing in Caravaggio’s painting, it is identical to one on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Michelangelo’s famous depiction of the creation of man has the hand of God reaching out to touch the hand of Adam. The hand of Jesus in the calling of Matthew by Caravaggio is pointing like the hand of God the Father, but identical to the hand of Adam in Michelangelo’s creation scene. In this way, Jesus is depicted with the nature of God and the nature of man. And Christ is the new Adam. Caravaggio was indeed a talented and an inspired artist.

Like the artist Caravaggio, God invites you to put a good deal of thought and prayer into the text of the Gospels. When we read scripture in a meditative way, God can speak to us. The tradition of reading Sacred Scripture in a spiritual way is called *Lectio Divina*. In English, the Latin word *divina* translates to divine. *Lectio* translates to reading. *Lectio Divina* follows a 4-step process:

- Begin by slowly reading the Gospel passage and then a second time ... and a third. In painting an artist might first sketch out an idea. As we read, a thought may come to mind or a word or phrase might stand out.
- Next there is mediation. “By using your imagination enter into the Biblical scene in order to ‘see’ the setting, the people, and the unfolding action. It is through this meditation that you encounter the text and discover its meaning for your life.”ⁱⁱⁱ
- The third step is prayer. With a prayer of petition, you might ask for a special grace. With a prayer of thanksgiving, you may acknowledge your blessings. With a prayer of adoration, praise God. With a prayer of repentance, ask for forgiveness or some healing in your relationships.
- The Final step is Contemplation. This “is a gaze turned toward Christ and the things of God”^{iv} that may help you to encounter Jesus through the Scripture. In our first reading from Ephesians, Saint Therese of Liseux connected with the verses “And he gave some as Apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12). Deeply in love with God, Therese wanted to encompass every vocation. She wanted to be an Apostle, a priest, a prophet, a martyr. Through contemplation she realized her vocation was Love. She wanted to make God loved by everyone. In her autobiography, she relays the experience of discovering her true vocation:

I understood that love embraces all vocations, that it is all things, and that it reaches out through all the ages, and to the uttermost limits of the earth, because it is eternal. Then, beside myself with joy, I cried out: “O Jesus, my Love, at last I have found my vocation. My vocation is love! Yes, I have found my place in the bosom of the Church, and this place, O my God, Thou hast Thyself given to me:

in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I will be LOVE! . . . Thus I shall be all things: thus will my dream be realized. . . .”^v

God called Matthew to leave his job as a tax collector and to follow him. Jesus calls each of us to a vocation. When we understand what God has in mind for us, our restless hearts will rest in the Lord. Our minds will be at peace. Our lives will reflect the Joy of the Gospel.

ⁱ franciscanmedia.org/saint-matthew/

ⁱⁱ khanacademy.org/humanities/renaissance-reformation/baroque-art1/baroque-italy/v/caravaggios-calling-of-saint-matthew

ⁱⁱⁱ uscgb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/meditations

^{iv} Ibid

^v lorettocarmel.org/book/cloister-vocation-of-love/ (Original source: *Story of a Soul*).