

***Homily for the Feast of Saint Matthew, Apostle & Evangelist
St. Thomas the Apostle Parish – West Springfield, Massachusetts
September 21, 2019***



Scripture Readings: [Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13](#) ✕ [Psalm 19:2-5](#) ✕ [Matthew 9:9-13](#)

 Our story in today's Gospel passage is one that we know well. Matthew, whose feast day we celebrate today, is a tax collector and, presumably, a sinful man, and followed Jesus and ate with Him, as did other sinners. The Pharisees objected to this because it violated their laws regarding ritual purity.

In Jesus' response to the objections of the Pharisees, He echoed Hosea when He said, "Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'" Jesus was referring the acts of Temple sacrifice. If mercy is above these sacrifices, then how much more is it above the rules of ritual purity?

The Pharisees knew Scripture well; they knew the law well, and they saw adherence to these strict laws in every aspect of life as doing the will of God. Yet, Jesus put mercy and love above these laws and traditions.

St. Paul affirmed this in his first letter to the people of Corinth when he said, "If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind."¹

Mercy springs forth from love and not righteousness. Mercy is the voice of God's love for us and His desire that we have life, and have it to the fullest, on earth and in the kingdom to come. Exclusion and criticism of sinners – of those whom Jesus came to save – is not a part of a merciful response.

In late June of 2018, Pope Francis addressed the fourteen people whom he had elevated to the rank of cardinal with these words: "None of us must feel superior to anyone. None of us should look down at others from above. The only time we can look at a person in this way is when we are helping them to stand up."²

As we seek to answer the call to spread the Good News, let us pray that the mercy and love of God may be the source of all our actions, words, and attitudes, toward and on behalf of the people we are called to serve. ✕

¹ [1 Corinthians 13:1-4a](#)

² Pope Francis, Consistory to elevate 14 new Cardinals of the Church, Vatican City State, June 28, 2018