

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: September 21

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IN BRIEF

Saint Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist

Tax collector from Capernaum called by Jesus, one of the twelve apostles, to whom tradition attributes the first Gospel.

Feast day	September 21
Died	1st century
Canonized	pre-congregation (immemorial veneration)
Era	1st century
Patron saint of	tax collectors, accountants, bankers, Salerno

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Matthew: "He Looked at Him with Mercy"

Novena to Saint Matthew

Cathedral of Saint Matthew in Salerno, Tomb of the Apostle

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist

Saint Matthew is one of the twelve apostles of Jesus. A tax collector in Capernaum, despised as a collaborator and a public sinner, he left everything the day Jesus said to him, "Follow me." Since the second century, Christian tradition has attributed to him the first of the four Gospels, the one that gives us the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes. His relics are venerated in Salerno, Italy. His feast day is September 21 in the Latin Church and November 16 in the Eastern Churches.

Who was Saint Matthew?

The Gospels tell us little about Matthew, but they tell us what matters. The Gospel of Matthew calls him Matthew; the Gospels of Mark and Luke tell the same scene and name the tax collector Levi, son of Alphaeus. Most commentators see one and the same person with two names, like Simon Peter.

He worked in Capernaum, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, along a busy trade route, collecting taxes on behalf of the government of Herod Antipas. Tax collectors, often suspected of growing rich at the expense of ordinary people, were counted among public sinners. This is the man Jesus chose to be one of the Twelve.

Key dates

- **c. 28-30**: Called by Jesus in Capernaum (Matthew 9:9); he becomes one of the Twelve.
- **c. 30**: Witness of the Passion, Resurrection and Ascension, according to the Gospels.
- **After the Ascension**: Present with the apostles gathered in Jerusalem (Acts 1:13).

- **c. 80-90**: The Gospel according to Matthew is written, according to most scholars.
- **Late first century (date unknown)**: Death, as a martyr according to tradition, in Ethiopia or Persia.
- **954**: His relics are brought to Salerno.
- **1084**: Pope Gregory VII consecrates Salerno Cathedral.

"Follow me": the call of a sinner

The Gospel account is remarkably brief: "As Jesus passed by, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And the man got up and followed him" (Matthew 9:9). No speech, no conditions. Right afterward, Matthew hosted a meal at his house, where many tax collectors and sinners gathered. The Pharisees were scandalized. Jesus answered with a sentence that sums up his mission: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." Quoting the prophet Hosea, he added: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."

In the list of the Twelve, the Gospel of Matthew is the only one to say "Matthew the tax collector" (Matthew 10:3), as if the apostle did not want anyone to forget where he came from. In 1599-1600, Caravaggio gave this scene a striking image: in a dark room, a ray of light follows the outstretched hand of Christ toward a man counting his money.



The Calling of Saint Matthew, by Caravaggio, in San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome (1599-1600).

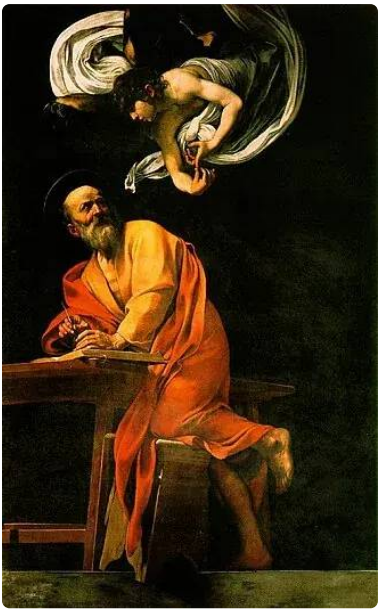
The Gospel according to Matthew

In the second century, Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, reported that Matthew had put the sayings of the Lord into writing in the Hebrew language; his testimony is quoted by the historian Eusebius of Caesarea. Saint Irenaeus of Lyon also attributes a Gospel to Matthew. The Gospel that has come down to us is written in Greek and draws heavily on the Gospel of Mark. Most scholars therefore think it was written around the years 80-90, in a Christian community of Jewish origin that looked to the apostle as its authority. The Church receives it as the Word of God under the name of Matthew.

A Gospel of fulfillment

This Gospel is especially concerned to show that Jesus fulfills the Scriptures of Israel. It opens with the genealogy of Jesus and the announcement of Emmanuel, "God with us," and closes with the promise of the risen Lord: "I

am with you always, to the end of the age." In it we find the Sermon on the Mount, with the Beatitudes and the Our Father, the great parables of the Kingdom, and the scene of the Last Judgment in which Christ identifies himself with "the least of these my brothers."



Saint Matthew and the Angel, by Caravaggio (1602), Contarelli Chapel, Rome.

Missions and martyrdom: what tradition says

After Pentecost, the New Testament says nothing more about Matthew. According to ancient traditions, he first preached the Gospel to the Jews of Palestine and then traveled to distant lands. The sources disagree about where: Ethiopia, a name that in antiquity referred to faraway regions to the south, or Persia. The best-known account, retold in the Middle Ages in the *Golden Legend*, says that he was killed while celebrating at the altar, on the orders of a king whose plans for marriage he had opposed. These stories belong more to legend than to history.

In 954, relics attributed to the apostle were brought to Salerno, in the Campania region of southern Italy. The Norman prince Robert Guiscard built a great cathedral there, consecrated in 1084 by Pope Gregory VII, who died in exile in Salerno the following year.

Why is Saint Matthew the patron saint of accountants and bankers?

Because Matthew spent his working life handling money and keeping accounts at his tax booth, he is the patron saint of tax collectors, accountants and bankers. He is also the patron of the city of Salerno, which has kept his relics for more than a thousand years.

Above all, Matthew bears witness to a simple truth: no one is too far away to be called. Jesus did not ask him to become better before following him; he looked at him with mercy and chose him. Matthew answered at once, and his joy turned into a feast open to everyone. Catholics pray to him for those who work with money, for those who feel unworthy of God, and for the grace to answer the Lord's call. Pope Francis took his motto, *miserando atque eligendo* ("by having mercy and by choosing"), from a homily of Saint Bede on Matthew's calling.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Matthew in art

- **A winged man or an angel**: his symbol among the four evangelists, because his Gospel begins with the human genealogy of Jesus.
- **A book or a quill**: he is shown writing his Gospel, sometimes guided by an angel.
- **A money bag, coins or a ledger**: reminders of his former work as a tax collector.
- **A sword or a halberd**: in some traditions, the instrument of his martyrdom.

Where to pray to Saint Matthew

- **Salerno, Italy**: the Cathedral of Saint Matthew, where his relics are venerated in the crypt. The city also celebrates the arrival of his relics on May 6.
- **Rome**: the Church of San Luigi dei Francesi and its Contarelli Chapel, with Caravaggio's three paintings of the apostle.
- **Capernaum, Galilee**: the site of the town where he was called, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

To pray with him, you can pray the prayer to Saint Matthew based on the Gospel account of his calling, or follow the novena to Saint Matthew from September 12 to 20, ending on the eve of his feast.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Matthew: "He Looked at Him with Mercy"

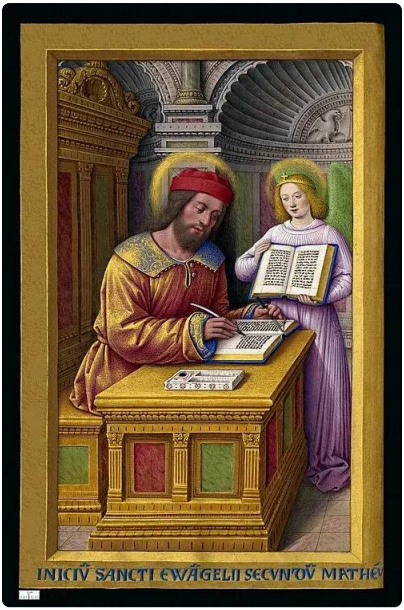
No ancient prayer composed by Saint Matthew has come down to us. To pray with him, the Church's tradition starts from the Gospel account of his calling and from the commentary given by Saint Bede the Venerable, which is read every September 21 in the Liturgy of the Hours. This page presents these two texts, followed by an original prayer to Saint Matthew.

The call of Matthew (Matthew 9:9-13)

Translated from the Greek by Saintspedia.

> *As Jesus passed by, he saw a man sitting at the tax booth; his name was Matthew. He said to him, "Follow me." And the man got up and followed him.*
>
> *While Jesus was at table in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. Seeing this, the Pharisees said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"*
>
> *Jesus heard them and said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

Source: Gospel according to Saint Matthew, chapter 9, verses 9 to 13; the quotation comes from the prophet Hosea (6:6).



Saint Matthew, apostle and evangelist.

"Miserando atque eligendo"

In the eighth century, the English monk Bede the Venerable commented on this scene in a homily. Translated from the Latin by Saintspedia; the original text is in the public domain.

> *"Jesus saw a tax collector, and because he looked at him with mercy and chose him, he said to him: Follow me."*

Source: Saint Bede the Venerable, *Homilies on the Gospels*, book I, homily 21. Pope Francis chose the Latin words *miserando atque eligendo*, "by having mercy and by choosing," as his motto.

Prayer to Saint Matthew

Saint Matthew, Jesus looked at you with mercy while you sat at your tax booth: pray for me.

You got up at once to follow him: teach me to answer without delay when the Lord calls me, even when I feel unworthy or too attached to my security.

You opened your home to tax collectors and sinners to celebrate your meeting with Jesus: give me a welcoming heart that looks down on no one.

I entrust to you all who work with money, that they may remain honest and fair, and all who think God does not want them. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

You handed on the Gospel of the Kingdom: help me to live the Beatitudes and to believe that the Lord is with us always, to the end of the age. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Matthew's feast day is September 21 in the Latin Church and November 16 in the Eastern Churches. In Salerno, the arrival of his relics is also celebrated on May 6. You can pray to him before an important decision at work, when you handle money or accounts, or when you feel far from God. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Matthew, and read about the life of Saint Matthew.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Matthew

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia. It follows Saint Matthew from his tax booth to the Gospel that bears his name. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast day, begin on September 12; it ends on September 20, the day before his feast on September 21.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation and, if you can, the passage from the Gospel of Matthew suggested for the day. Then say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father, the prayer that Matthew's Gospel hands on to us. You may also end each day by asking Saint Matthew to pray for you and for your intention. The small act suggested for each day helps the Gospel take root in your life.

Day 1: The tax booth

Matthew is sitting at his work, surrounded by money and accounts, when Jesus passes by. God meets us where we are, not where we would like to be. He does not wait for us to be ready; he comes into the ordinary place of our days.

Prayer: Lord, pass through my ordinary life today, in the middle of my work and my worries.

Today: Read Matthew 9:9-13.

Day 2: The look of mercy

Jesus looked at Matthew with mercy before choosing him. That look does not begin with reproach, but with love. Everything in Matthew's new life flows from this first moment.

Prayer: Jesus, look at me with mercy, and teach me to look at others in the same way.

Today: Let go of a harsh judgment you hold about someone.

Day 3: Getting up and following

"He got up and followed him." Matthew's answer is immediate. He leaves behind his security, his income and his reputation, trusting the One who called him.

Prayer: Lord, give me the freedom to get up when you call me, without putting it off until tomorrow.

Today: Do one good thing you have been putting off for a long time.

Day 4: The feast at Matthew's house

Matthew opens his home and invites his friends, the tax collectors. Conversion is shared with joy, around a table. Those who meet Christ want others to meet him too.

Prayer: Lord, make my home a place of welcome, where everyone can feel expected.

Today: Invite someone who is often alone, for a meal or a coffee.

Day 5: The doctor of the sick

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." No one is too far away for God, and no one is righteous enough to do without him. Jesus does not shy away from our weakness: he comes precisely to heal it.

Prayer: Lord, I bring you my wounds and my sins. Come and heal me.

Today: Prepare for confession, or take time for an examination of conscience.

Day 6: The Beatitudes

The Gospel of Matthew gives us the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes turn our ideas of happiness upside down: blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers. They describe the face of Jesus himself, and they become possible for us with his grace.

Prayer: Lord, teach me the happiness of the Beatitudes, even when it goes against my calculations.

Today: Read Matthew 5:1-12 and choose one Beatitude to live by today.



Praying with Saint Matthew, apostle and evangelist.

Day 7: Where your treasure is

The man who once counted money hands on the words of Jesus: "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Money is a good servant but a bad master. Matthew knew this well: he left his table of coins to find a greater treasure.

Prayer: Lord, free my heart from attachment to money. Teach me to share.

Today: Make a gift to a person or a charity in need.

Day 8: The least of my brothers

In the scene of the Last Judgment, Christ says: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Christ is hidden in the poor, and Matthew's Gospel invites us to look for him there, in very concrete gestures of care.

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes to recognize you in those who are hungry, in strangers, in the sick and in prisoners.

Today: Read Matthew 25:31-46 and carry out a work of mercy.

Day 9: I am with you always

The Gospel of Matthew ends with the sending out of the disciples on mission and with a promise: the risen Christ remains with his disciples until the end of the age. The novena ends with this same assurance.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Matthew, make me your witness, and stay with me every day. Amen.

Today: Share with someone a word of the Gospel that has touched you.

Closing prayer

Saint Matthew, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have presented. Pray for me, for those who work with money, and for those who think they are far from God. Help me to let Christ look at me, to get up and to follow him. Amen.

To go further, read about the life of Saint Matthew and pray the prayer to Saint Matthew based on the account of his calling.

PILGRIMAGE

Cathedral of Saint Matthew in Salerno, Tomb of the Apostle

Salerno Cathedral, in Campania in southern Italy, is dedicated to Saint Matthew, whose relics have been venerated there since the 10th century. It is the main pilgrimage site dedicated to the apostle and evangelist in the West. It also houses the tomb of Pope Saint Gregory VII.

The arrival of the relics in Salerno

According to local tradition, the apostle's remains, which came from the East, were first kept in Lucania, south of Salerno. In 954 they were solemnly transferred to Salerno, on May 6, a date the city still commemorates. Saint Matthew then became the patron of the city. In the 11th century, the Norman prince Robert Guiscard, who had just taken the city, had a new cathedral built to house them. It was consecrated in 1084 by Pope Gregory VII, who had taken refuge in Salerno and died there in 1085.

The cathedral and its crypt

You enter the cathedral through a vast Romanesque atrium surrounded by arcades, dominated by a tall 12th-century bell tower. The bronze doors were cast in Constantinople in the 11th century. The interior was largely remodeled in the 18th century, after the earthquake of 1688, but it keeps medieval ambos and mosaic pavements.

The heart of the pilgrimage is the crypt, entirely decorated in the 17th century with polychrome marbles and frescoes. Above the altar, which stands over the apostle's tomb, rises a double bronze statue of Saint Matthew, two figures set back to back, by the sculptor Michelangelo Naccherino (early 17th century).

Praying at the tomb of Saint Matthew

Before your visit, you can reread the life of Saint Matthew and the account of his calling in the Gospel (Mt 9:9-13). In the crypt, a time of silence is a chance to entrust an intention, for example for someone who thinks they are far from God. The prayer to Saint Matthew suits this moment well. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.



Cathedral of Saint Matthew in Salerno, tomb of the apostle, the interior.

Other places of Saint Matthew

- **Rome**: the Church of San Luigi dei Francesi, whose Contarelli Chapel holds three paintings by Caravaggio devoted to the apostle: the *Calling*, the *Inspiration*, and the *Martyrdom* of Saint Matthew.
- **Capernaum** (Galilee): the archaeological site of the town where Jesus called him, with its ancient synagogue.

Practical information

Salerno is easy to reach by train from Naples or Rome. The cathedral is in the historic center, a few minutes' walk from the waterfront. On September 21, the feast day of the patron saint, a great procession crosses the city with the apostle's statue. Mass times and crypt visiting hours vary: ask the Archdiocese of Salerno before you come.

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