

Reflection for the Feast Day of St Matthias – 14th May 2020



Altarpiece of Saints Thomas and Matthias

<http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/diglib-fulldisplay.pl?SID=20200504348873879&code=act&RC=55868&Row=1>

Matthias was the only disciple, as far as we know, who ever won a lottery.

When Judas lost his job as a disciple the other disciples chose an interesting way of choosing a replacement. They proposed two people, Joseph and Matthias, and then they cast lots, or shook dice, to

decide which one should get the job. Perhaps this is the scene in the picture accompanying this reflection, maybe the dice are in the chalice on the altar and those gathered (11 disciples plus Joseph and Matthias?) are praying ardently for God to act. Evidently the eleven disciples who organised the lottery, believed that by making the choice by lot they were leaving the decision to God. Matthias won the lottery.

This raises the fascinating question, where is God in seemingly random situations of chance?

Personally I find it difficult to believe that God somehow manipulated the dice which determined that Matthias would join the 12 rather than poor Joseph. However, I do believe that God is present and has a profound effect in seemingly random acts of chance! But I believe that the presence of God has its effect on the other side of the deal, that is, on the recipient of the lottery win.

I believe that there is chance, there is randomness in creation. I don't believe that God micro-manages every situation. There aren't endless departments in heaven responsible for house purchases, job interviews, exam passes, match-making, lottery wins, where endless angels ensure that everything happens in accordance with some masterplan. But God does have a profound effect on the way people respond when the great lottery finger of fortune points to them. So if I won £10 million on the lottery I wouldn't think that God had smiled on me and given me that win as a kind of blessing, but I would, hopefully, consider what to do with the money in line with my faith and the way I believe God calls us to live. Would it mean that I would share it out equally with all all my friends and colleagues at York Minster? You'll have to wait and see!

More importantly, I think that Matthias got the job as the twelfth disciple by chance. What was important was that he responded with grace and threw himself into his new role with enthusiasm. Like the rest of the 'Twelve' he preached the gospel and, depending on which historian you read, he was martyred, either by being beheaded in Jerusalem or crucified in some distant part of the Roman empire. The point is that he



embraced the opportunity that came his way, considered his response in terms of his obedience to God and his faith in Jesus and committed himself wholeheartedly to it. I can't help wondering what happened to Joseph? Hopefully he didn't go off in a huff but he received the news and considered his response in terms of his obedience to God and faith in Jesus and led a positive and creative life just not as a leader of the early church.

And what of us? We should be faithful and committed in our relationship with God and our discipleship of Jesus and have the courage to seize opportunities, or accept crises, and respond to them appropriately, seeking, always to be creative with both 'success' or 'failure', seeking always to respond with generosity, compassion and love.

As Jesus says in the gospel today,

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.' John 15v12

God is present in randomness and chance in the way we respond to what comes our way – so long as we respond by seeking to love as Jesus loved, we will always ultimately be winners.