

Today, our very own Matthias—Matthias Rappe—must be pretty excited. I mean, he’s got his own feast day! How many of us can say that? And while it might not be for him exactly, it’s still his namesake!

Now, truth be told, I’m guessing there are some of us here this morning who didn’t even know St. Matthias was an apostle. In fact, maybe some of us didn’t even know there was a man named Matthias in the Bible at all. And honestly, we really couldn’t hold that against you, because there’s not much to say about him. In fact, for much of Church history, Matthias has been largely ignored—no offense, Matthias. It wasn’t even until the eleventh century that he was put on the Church’s calendar. That means for half of the Church’s timeline, Matthias went without any mention. So for many, Matthias has been all but forgotten.

And when you look at the scriptural evidence, it’s actually surprising he ever got a feast day at all—even if it was a thousand years in the making. You see, the only reason Matthias is anything is because first there were 12, but then there were 11. And that was a number the Church just couldn’t live with. 12 was too important, after all! 12 was the number of tribes in Israel, from whom God populated His Old Testament people. And so symmetrically, 12 would have to be the number of apostles, by whose preaching God would grow His New Testament Church. So, it was important that they get their number back up to 12! They needed somebody to fill the slot.

Our Second Reading from Acts this morning tells us about how they did that. They called together a meeting of 120 of the brethren. And Peter got up and explained the situation (without sparing the gory details). He even reached back to the Psalms to explain how someone needed to replace Judas.

Now, how ‘bout that—like, who would ever want to be the successor to Judas? After such a sneaky, underhanded, backstabbing, two-face, lowlife, what person in their right mind would want to follow an act like that? “Oh, you’re the guy filling in for Judas”—nobody would want to be that guy. You could never hope to live down the memory of such a predecessor. I doubt Peter got many resumes for the position.

Anyway, Peter goes on with his speech, giving the qualifications for the job of apostle. Whoever it is, needs to be a man who’s been with them since the beginning—from the Baptism of John through the day Jesus ascended into heaven—and they needed to be an eyewitness of the resurrection to boot. I can guarantee that shortened the list substantially. And out of the 120 men gathered there, they quickly whittled it down to two names.

We don’t know much about either candidate. All we do know is their names—and we know three times as much about the one who wasn’t chosen as we do the one who was. I say that because the one who wasn’t chosen had three names—Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus—while the one who was chosen just had one name, Matthias. And after selecting these two men, it says, they prayed. Probably Joseph, called Barsabbas or Justus, and Matthias were each praying that the other guy would be chosen—at least they would’ve if they were smart.

So, finally comes the election—“You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go his own way” . . . But after that . . . *crickets* . . . nothing happened. So, then they try casting lots—y’know, give God something to work with, I guess. Sounds like short straw wins. Well, Matthias draws the short straw. So, Matthias wins, if you can call it that. The Bible just says, “the lot fell on Matthias.” And that’s the first time we hear about Matthias. And that’s the last time we hear about Matthias. It’s just a short story about him being chosen (seemingly by chance) to replace the likes of Judas.

All we have is a name—Matthias. That’s it. Just a footnote in history. Almost forgotten by the Church. Barely stands out in a list of the saints. Just a name.

Dare I say, I’m not much different. Sure, to some people I’m a little more. But that’s now. When I’m dead and gone, my kids might still remember me. God willing, a grandchild or two might. But that will be it. Then, at best, I’ll just be a name . . . on a headstone.

But that's looking at it from our perspective. That's just seeing things this side of heaven. Just a name? . . . Not to God—No, to God Matthias is anything but just a name. It might seem like he's just playing second fiddle to the other apostles, but as St. Augustine once said, "God loves each of us as if there were only one of us." And that's how God loved Matthias.

With that kind of perspective let's revisit our text. God could've chosen anyone on the planet to be the next apostle, but He chose Matthias. Sure, just one more name was all that was needed to make twelve—but only name could be selected. And for reasons known only to God, Matthias was the one single person on the face of the earth picked to be that apostle—imagine that! It was him, no one else, who was elected to be the next pillar of the Church, one of the first bold preachers of the Gospel. And who knows, maybe he's even the reason you or I ever had a chance to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ in the first place. —Maybe if we were able, maybe we could trace that preaching all the way back to Matthias—without Him, we might not know the Lord. So yes, Matthias is anything but just a name.

The same thing is true for any of us—we are anything but just a name. At times, we might feel like we're just playing second fiddle to the greats of history, but "God loves each of us as if there were only one of us." You are the reason, after all, God made the world. Seriously, you are the reason God put the stars in the heavens and hung the planets in the sky. You are the reason God molded the land and filled up the seas. You are the reason God created the beautiful wildlife. And you are the reason God came into that creation, to be just like you. You are the reason He was born like you, with ten fingers and ten toes, two eyes, two ears, a mouth and a nose. You are the reason He could face something like the cross, knowing what He had to do. And you are the reason not even death could hold Him. It is all because of you.

It was to call you by name. It was to write your name in His Book of Life. It was to confess your name before His Father in heaven. Just a name? . . . *Just a name?* . . . No, not you. . . Not to God. Not to the one who "loves each of us as if there were only one of us."

I know in this big, wide world, it's easy to feel small and insignificant. When it comes to this life, you can all too often go feeling unnoticed. In the scope of history, it might feel like you'll always be second fiddle and never first chair. But today, with St. Matthias, we come to find out what that really means.

You see, Leonard Bernstein, the late conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, was once asked to name the most difficult instrument to play. And without hesitation, he replied, "The second fiddle. I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find someone who can play the second fiddle with enthusiasm—that's a problem. And if we have no second fiddle, then we have no harmony."

You're not just second fiddle—*but you're second fiddle!* It could've been anybody else—anyone in the world—but it's you. And without you, Bernstein says, it would all fall apart. Sure, there are plenty of first violinists, but to find someone like you—well, that's something special. So play on, my friend—*play, with enthusiasm!*