

JANUARY 18, 2025 FATHER ROSHAN LOY D'SOUZA

Most people want to think of themselves as good people. When we self-identify as "good people," any questioning of this is likely to be experienced as a personal attack. It is, after all, your perceived identity as a good person that is being challenged. In this case, a defensive reaction is to be expected. But what if we aspire to be good people without self-identifying as such? It is the self-identifying as "good" that makes criticism an attack. Aspiration, on the other hand, calls for continual self-assessment and course correction. The proud person may only see humiliation or self-debasement in owning their mistakes. The humble aspirant, however, sees opportunities for growth, to become a better person.

What kind of people did Jesus come to save? For most Christians, this should be an easy question to answer. We know that Jesus came to save sinners and that all have sinned. But then the question becomes, how does this truth impact our lives? If we believe in the mission of Jesus to save sinners as taking the message of salvation to those who need to hear, in almost the exact way in which Jesus called his other disciples, now he calls Levi to follow him, who is known to be Matthew. Jesus calls a known traitor and thief as a disciple. In Levi's response, we see the authority of Jesus and the effectiveness of his call.

It's clear that when Jesus called, Levi's heart was changed. He was willing to leave everything behind in order to follow Jesus. While every person is a sinner and equally in need of salvation, the call and response of Levi is a reminder of the power of Jesus to save any sinner and to change any heart. Just as a doctor tends to the sick and not to the well, Jesus has come to save the sinners. Jesus appeals to the Pharisees with the categories of the sick and the well. But while he knew they thought themselves to be among the well, this is a false position. No one is well

apart from Christ the Lord, but the Pharisees are blind to their disease and their need for healing.

While the Pharisees may not have understood, Jesus was warning them of their own self-righteousness, futility of trusting in their own religious works, and their adherence to the law. Often, we can very easily find ourselves in the position of the Pharisees, trusting in our own religious habits and looking down on those who are less pious. Jesus' interactions with the Pharisees should remind us of our own position as sinners and of the dangers of self-righteousness. The conversion of Levi and others in this passage is good and helpful reminder: all who repent and believe will be saved.

In Christ we can be forgiven, and we should share this message of forgiveness with others. In today's first reading from Letter to the Hebrews, we heard, "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it 'derives'"—Or "divides soul from spirit." So, it is a beautiful reminder to us to depend our lives on the word of God. When word becomes part of our life, it guides us to journey towards the right path. It leads us to that heavenly kingdom that all of us want to be in. So, every day, we need to read the word of God, build our lives on it.

Secondly, the word should help us to change, as Levi's life was when he encountered Christ. Every day, when we reflect on the word of God, it challenges us to become better people, better person, and that leads us to enjoy eternal happiness. Thirdly, the word of God helps us to realize who we are. It focuses on those areas that we need to change every day: maybe small sins that we encounter in our thoughts, words and actions. Little changes every day helps us to become the best version of ourselves.

And finally, the word of God is light to our path. The word helps us to make better choices. Life is all about birth and death, but in between that "B" and "D" comes "C," the choices that we make every day.

Sometimes, some choices are challenging. Some choices helps us to introspect. Some choices make us better people, and some decisions enables us to know that we are in the hand of God. So, every day, let us make better choices to become the best version of ourselves. And therefore, as we live the word every day in our lives, let us surrender our will to God, that we may be guided by the Spirit of God.