

2025-08-17: 2nd Sunday of Mesore - Follow Me

Visual Aid

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/kb3sihtftcl4c2oaq5uyu/Follow-Me.pptx?rlkey=cc4r5g3l8vqfh02x3zsyxkrkm&dl=0>

Background

Good morning, dear beloved

We are coming to the end of the Coptic year now - today is the 2nd Sunday of the Blessed Month of Mesore.

And the Church arranged for us today the Gospel Reading of the Calling of Matthew the Apostle. Matthew was a tax-collector named Levi working in a tax office and the Lord passed by him and said two words: "Follow Me." The Gospels don't mention to us that they had any interaction before that. They don't mention that Levi saw a miracle or heard a teaching. It was two words - Follow Me.

I think to better understand this story, we have to understand a little bit of the culture in the time of the Lord Jesus Christ - 1st Century Judaism.

Follow Me

In those days, education was very structured for Jewish males.

A boy, from age 5-10 would go to the Synagogue and learn Torah, Hebrew Language, memorization, chanting, etc. Sort of like Elementary School. Then from age 10-14, those who excelled would go to school to learn the Oral Law and the Prophetic books. And this is like Middle School.

At 13 or 14 years old, there would be a split. Those students that were not the top of their class or were not so exceptional in their schooling, would go back to their family business or find a different trade to work in. They were respectable, but they were ordinary. What about the exceptional ones?

They would seek out Rabbis and ask to become their disciple. The Rabbi would examine him - quiz him on his knowledge of the Torah, test his memory, see how he applies Scripture to situations, assess his reputation. And if he doesn't pass the exam, the Rabbi would reject him. He might tell him to go back to his family and their trade, or tell him you don't have what it takes, or just you cannot be my disciple.

So if he passes the Rabbi's test - if he is the best of the best, top of the class in his village or town, memorizing the whole Torah, having a good reputation, then the Rabbi would look at him and say: "Follow me." And he would follow him.

The Lord Jesus comes to Levi today and says "Follow Me." No test, no memorization, no reputation... even though Levi had a terrible reputation. He's a tax collector - he's taking money from Jews and giving it to Romans, he's supporting the enemy! That didn't matter - "Follow Me." So it's no wonder that Levi left all, rose up, and followed Him. And the same goes for all of the disciples. The Lord chose His disciples from the rejected - those who were filtered out by the system already. Those who weren't the most knowledgeable in Torah. Those who didn't have advanced training in the Oral Law. Those who weren't experts in the prophets. Those who didn't have the best reputations. So the Lord, goes to THEM and says the words that they all wished to hear in their youth - "Follow Me."

What does it mean to "Follow Him?"

St Matthew - again, Levi is St Matthew - he did five things today. And we'll take them as five points for our benefit.

"And He said to him, 'Follow Me.' So he left all, rose up, and followed Him. Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house." (Luke 5:28-29)

1 - Hear His Voice

The first thing Levi did is he heard the voice of the Lord Jesus. And he wasn't in a private conversation, he wasn't in the Synagogue, he was sitting at the tax office. In the hustle and bustle of people paying their taxes and bartering and arguing, he heard the voice of the Lord.

Are we listening to the voice of the Lord?

The Lord is telling us to Follow Him... but can we hear Him?

There are other voices:

- The biggest commodity in today's digital world is my attention. Everyone wants my attention. Everyone wants me to hear their message. Every game on my phone gives me notifications "hey you earned coins, come back and play!" Every news site sends me notifications. YouTube videos are paid by retention - the longer I have you hooked on my video, the more money I make. How many ads can I put in this video or on this page. These are voices! And they are distracting!
- The voice of others around me, my friends and family, peer pressure. The friend who tells me "come ride the car with me, let's skip Sunday School." The friend who offers me drugs, vapes, alcohol, gambling. The coworker who wants me to lie or cheat to get ahead. These are voices. And they are distracting.

- Also, the voice of the devil, trying to tempt us and deceive us. The devil who deceives you with sin "just do it, you can confess after." The devil who deceives you "Don't confess, Abouna will judge you." This is the voice of the devil. And it is distracting.

But can we set those aside and hear the voice of the Lord?

The Lord Jesus didn't call Levi in silence, but in the middle of all these distractions.

If my ears are not tuned to the frequency of His voice, then I won't hear Him. If I can't hear Him, then I can't Follow Him.

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." (John 10:27)

How do I tune my ears to His voice?

- By engulfing myself in the Scripture
- By listening to the Sunday School lessons, Youth Meeting topics and the Sermons
- By reading spiritual books - the books of HH Pope Shenouda, books about the saints, books about virtues, books about the Fathers, books about the liturgy and the rituals.
- Prayer - like Samuel who prayed: "Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears." and then was able to discern the Lord's voice
- Spiritual guidance - from my Father of Confession or Spiritual Father, from my servants, from someone older who I know is faithful and filled with God's wisdom

The more I engulf myself in God's voice, the more I will be able to hear Him.

Let me ask myself at the end of every day - whose voice filled most of my day? Was it God's voice or was it something else?

2 - He Left All

When the Lord Jesus said to Levi: "Follow Me," Levi left all. No excuses. No hesitation. No looking back.

Let me leave behind the evil things, the things that are causing me to sin, the people that are causing me to sin.

Today in the Catholic Epistle, we read from 1 John: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world."

All that is in the world. Any evil thing or any sin can be categorized under these three categories: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life.

The gospel tells us that St Matthew "Left all." He didn't say "okay I'll follow you and I'll work as a tax-collector part-time." Or "I'll follow you on Saturday and Sunday but I have work during the week." No, he left all.

"Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:33)

We can't have the old life and the new life at the same time.

It seems radical to leave all... and it is! The Gospel is radical. Being a disciple is radical. If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Radical. Leave all - even my eye? Yes, even your eye. How?

- If your social media causes you to sin, deactivate it.
- If your phone causes you to sin, replace it with a dumb phone.
- If your computer or your internet causes you to sin, cut it off. Move it to the living room where everyone can see what you're doing. Or go use the internet at Starbucks or at the Public Library.
- If your friend causes you to sin, he's not your friend - walk away. Get another friend. Why do you need someone who is causing you to sin? Someone who offers you drugs, or vaping, or alcohol, or gambling, or skipping school, or or or. Why?

"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26)

Following the Lord requires us to leave all.

Let me ask myself: What is one thing I am clinging to that is preventing me from following Him?

3 - Rose Up

Levi left all and then he rose up. He took action. Imagine if he said "Okay I'm following you, Jesus" but he doesn't get up from his chair... we do that sometimes.

- Okay Lord, today I'm going to pray as soon as I wake up! And then I set my alarm for 10 minutes before work.
- Okay Lord, today I'm going to read the Bible before I sleep! And then I turn on a movie.
- Okay Lord, this year I'm going to fast the whole Great Lent! And then I book a cruise for the first week of it.

Saying it is easy. Doing it is the hard part.

St James says: "Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." (James 2:18)

Levi rose up - he took an action. He made a decision in the moment.

Abouna Reweis shared with us last night the story of St Paesa and her repentance. And in her story, the Lord revealed to St John the short that St Paesa's repentance was accepted the moment she left the house of sin. When she took action.

Abouna also shared an example of a hurricane - if the weatherman says a hurricane is coming, believing him is not enough. I need to board up my windows, bring in my trash bins, gather

supplies... only then will I be ready.

Following the Lord requires action. Levi rose up!

What actions can I take to follow Him? To become an active disciple?

- Set a time for prayer
- Read the Scripture
- Repent and Confess
- Receive the Eucharist
- Fasting

We all know the answers... we know what we need to do... we know what is good for us. But do we do it? The important part is taking action. Intentionality.

- Set a time for prayer
 - There's a big difference between saying "I will pray in the morning" and setting an alarm clock for prayer.
- Read a passage from the Scripture and meditate on it
 - Don't just say "I will read the Bible today." - but make a plan. Pick a passage, set a time and prepare an explanation to read
- Repent and sit for confession with Abouna
 - The one who says "I will confess when Abouna is not busy" will never confess. Send Abouna a message and say "I need to set a time for confession." Arrange a time and then be there.
- Receive the Eucharist
 - Be prepared. I know I have liturgy on Sunday, so I will make sure I am reconciled with my brother, and I have confessed what I need to confess, BEFORE then. Be intentional!
- Fasting
 - Several days before the fast begins, prepare your refrigerator. Finish the non-fasting food - the meat, the dairy. Buy some fasting food. Be intentional about your fast. Take action!

Let me ask myself - what is an action that I will take today to rise up like Levi and follow the Lord?

4 - Followed Him

So he left all, rose up, and followed Him.

Following a Rabbi was not just "come walk behind me" - it meant to leave your home and your family and your village and your trade and travel with him full time. It meant to learn his teaching. It meant to imitate his life - his speech, his actions, his mannerisms.

This is exactly what Levi did with the Lord Jesus Christ. He spent time with Him, he heard His teachings, and He imitated His life.

St Paul teaches us: "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also loved us" (Ephesians 5:1)

Following the Lord is about imitating His virtues in every relationship, in every role, in every aspect of my life: DAILY.

- At home
 - Speaking with love to my parents, my siblings, my children.
 - Helping without complaining
- At school or work
 - Being honest even if no one is watching
 - Helping someone who is struggling, to overcome their struggle
 - Shutting my ears to gossip and harmful speech
- With friends
 - Offering encouragement instead of criticism
 - Fostering good habits with each other

St Paul reminds us in today's epistle:

- Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
- Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord
- Bondservants [Employees], be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling
- Masters [Employers], do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven

Following the Lord is about imitating His virtues and striving to become like Him in all aspects of my life.

What is one specific way that I can imitate Christ today? In my words, actions or relationships

5 - Great Feast in His Own House

Finally, Levi celebrated His discipleship by inviting the Lord to his house and making a gathering of all of those around him to share the Lord with them.

Following the Lord is not just something personal, but it means that we share His love and His mercy and His truth with others.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

- When I show love to someone, they will see my good work and glorify my Father in heaven.
- When I show mercy to someone, they will see my good work and glorify my Father in heaven.

With my actions, I can share the faith. There's a saying: "Preach the gospel, and if necessary use words." I can spread the message of the gospel simply with my actions, my behaviors and my speech. That which I imitate in Christ.

At the end of the liturgy today, Abouna will say "Go in peace, the peace of the Lord be with you all." - This peace that we receive from the Liturgy is meant to go out with us into the world. Do we take into the world? Or even into our neighborhood? Or even into our own homes?

Is my house a house of prayer, a house of purity and a house of blessing? Is my house a house of peace? Is my house a house of forgiveness and compassion and love and mercy? Is the Lord invited to my house? Or is my house a place of arguing and complaining? Is it a place of gossip?

What do I share with my coworkers and my classmates and my friends? Is it rumors and stories? Is it just jokes and memes? Or do I share the Lord Jesus Christ? Do I share a verse that resonated with me? Do I share a story of a saint that I liked? Do I share a positive word, a word of encouragement? Do I share a smile? Do I share good deeds? Do I share love and mercy?

Am I a light to the world and salt of the earth?

This is what Levi did today - he invited all of the tax-collectors and sinners to his house to meet the Lord. This was his response to discipleship. This is how he followed the Lord.

Conclusion

The Lord said to Levi - Follow Me, and Levi became His disciple. We, too, are disciples of the Lord. The word Christian means "disciple of Christ." What does it mean to be a disciple? What does it mean to follow Him?

There's a flavor of Evangelical Protestantism in the world now that is "seeker-sensitive" or "seeker-friendly." They love to say "Come as you are." And "The Lord loves you just the way you are." In Orthodoxy, our message is a little different. Yes, come as you are... but be ready to follow Him. And following Him means radical change:

- Leaving behind the sins, distractions and attachments of the world. Maybe even how I dress, how I speak, or my lifestyle.
- Following Him means rising up and making a commitment to be active in my discipleship; intentional in my spiritual life
- Following Him means listening, learning and imitating the life of Christ
- Sharing His love, mercy and truth with those around us

May the Lord grant all of us to take the example of our beloved St Matthew - to hear the Lord's voice, to leave all, to rise up, to follow Him and to share Him with the world.

Glory be to God, forever. Amen.