

Discipleship *The Fellowship Degree* *Part 2*

MATTHEW

THE MASTER saw a man named Matthew sitting at the receipt of customs and said unto him, “Follow me.” Matthew was a tax collector for the Roman government and collected revenues from his own people for foreign tribute, which earned for him the despised name of “publican.” He left a position of much prominence and great wealth to follow Christ Jesus. Afterward, though he attained to high spiritual power, he retained always a deep humility of spirit. It is only in his own Gospel that he is referred to as Matthew, the publican. The name Matthew means “God’s gift.”

In Palestine a tax-collector, or publican, in the employ of the Roman government was a social leper. Publican and sinner were synonymous terms in the minds of the people. The “tainted money” of such men as Matthew was rejected by the Temple; their oath was null and void in the courts. From such degradation was Matthew called to become one of the Twelve.

Another legend from the East is to this effect:

A group of boys crowded around the body of a dog lying dead in a Jerusalem gutter. One of them remarked, “It has one eye gouged out.” Another said, “He’s lost an ear in a fight.” “What an ugly brute!” exclaimed a third. “His hair is matted with dirt and blood.”

“But look at his teeth,” suggested a stranger passing by. “They are as white and fine as pearls.”

“Who is that?” asked one of the boys, and one who knew Him replied, “It is Jesus, the Galilean.”

One of the principal aims of the divine Way



School of Ghirlandaio, fifteenth century, Santa Maria Novella, Florence

St. Matthew and the Angel

Matthew's radical change of vocation—from receiving taxes to receiving God's Word—is a pattern that all humans trace.

Shower was to teach men to manifest their latent divinity. Yea, and the divinity within every thing. That this man Matthew, once a despised publican and then one of the immortal Twelve, learned this lesson is evidenced by the prominence accorded the Golden Rule in his Gospel. It has been said that Matthew wrote this Rule in letters of fire upon everlasting parchment.

His transformation from the old life into the new was complete and thorough. All the parables of Matthew's Gospel bespeak fair play, equitable distribution and selfless reciprocity. Under the Master's divine spell he ceased to be “Matthew the publican,” and became “Matthew the saint.” His Gospel emphasizes the fact that man cannot serve two masters, and he proved it in his own life.

His ministry centered largely in casting out of demoniac entities (obsessions). In Hierapolis he healed the wife of King Fulvanus; also the king's son and the son's wife who were similarly afflicted. Out of gratitude they all embraced Christianity and after Matthew left they continued to serve the Christ.

The following is an old record of Matthew's

martyrdom: "He, having healed the king's wife of obsession, the demon appeared to the king disguised as a soldier to enlist his aid in procuring the death of Matthew. Whenever the (demon) soldier appeared, Matthew became invisible. The king went into the church saying that he wished to become a disciple of Matthew, but when he approached the saint, he was smitten with blindness. Matthew healed him by touching his eyes. When he attempted to remonstrate with the king for his evil ways, the king had him arrested and nailed to the cross. His body was covered with oil and a heap of brushwood lighted about him. But the fire changed into dew and Matthew lay unharmed as if asleep. Many came and touched his body and were healed of illnesses and obsessions. The king then had the body placed in an iron casket and dropped in the sea. Matthew's disciples took bread and wine to the seashore and as the Sun arose they saw Matthew walking on the sea with two men in shining garments."

This mystic legend refers to the initiatory rites of Fire and Water, wherein the disciple learns that he possesses the ability to pass through both these elements and remain unharmed. The legend gives the added information that the king, together with his wife and son, became Christians. Matthew blessed them and the king's name was changed from Fulvanus to Matthew; his wife's name from Ziphazia to Sophia (wisdom); the name of his son's wife from Erva to Synesius (understanding).

On becoming an Initiate the aspirant receives a new name, symbolical of certain spiritual characteristics which he has already developed or is about to acquire. One Initiate, on learning the new name of another, is immediately apprised of the status of his development.

Matthew lived a life of extreme austerity, subsisting on nuts, roots, and berries. He remained in Jerusalem for a number of years after the Crucifixion and then went into Egypt and Ethiopia to teach and to heal. His Gospel contains the accounts of two miracles, ten parables, nine discourses, and fourteen incidents that are related to certain phases of initiatory attainment not found in the other Gospels.

The early Church Fathers write concerning

Matthew:

"He was for forty days praying and fasting in the mountains, when Christ Jesus appeared to him saying: 'Take this rod of mine and go down and plant it at the gate of the church founded by you and Andrew; as soon as planted it will become a tree, with branches thirty cubits long and every branch bearing a different fruit. From the top shall flow honey and from the root will spring a great fountain in which all the creatures of the earth shall bathe and be cleansed, become ashamed of their nakedness put on clothing of the rams of sheep.' Matthew did as he was requested and all who bathed there saw themselves changed into the likeness of Matthew. The tree was beautiful and flourishing like the plants of Paradise and a river proceeded from it which watered all the land."

Such legends as these are interesting to the esoteric Christian, for they are replete with occult truths. They bear signs familiar to all who have passed the same mystic way and who, having glimpsed the vision, are endeavoring to tread the Path of Attainment.

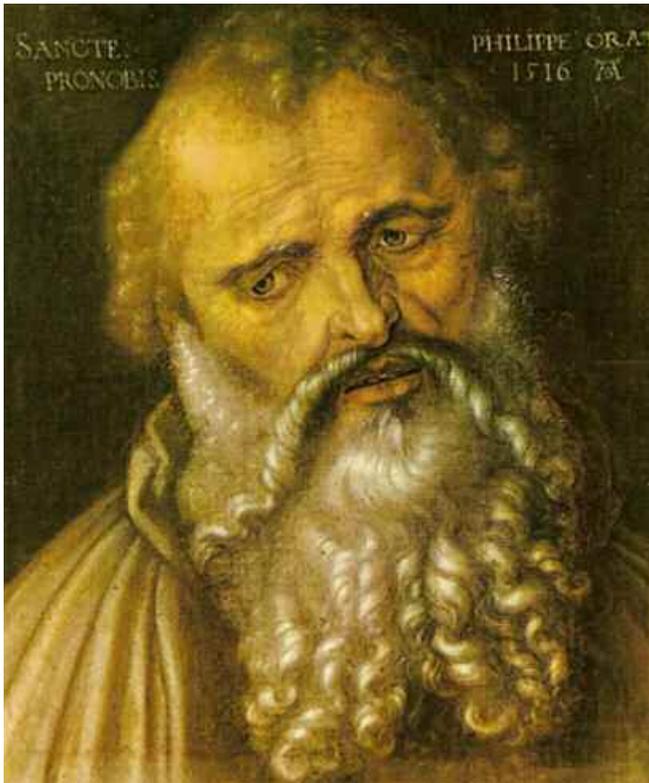
PHILIP

Philip of Bethsaida is mentioned seven times in the New Testament and each reference is indicative of his temperament, which was spiritual and yet matter-of-fact, steadfast, sincere and dependable. Tall and slender, he was of commanding appearance, with dark hair and flashing blue eyes. Legend reports that his sister Marianne also became a disciple of the new way and accompanied Philip and his friend Nathanael upon their missionary pilgrimages into foreign lands. Philip was the first apostle to the Samaritans.

It was Philip and Matthew who were summoned by Jesus to feed the multitude, but they were unable to make the demonstration. So the Master himself multiplied the loaves and fishes to feed five thousand:

*And they did all eat, and were filled.
And they took up twelve baskets full of the
fragments, and of the fishes.
And they that did eat of the loaves were about
five thousand men.—Mark 6:42-44*

Despite their failure on this occasion, the mere



Tempera on canvas, Albrecht Dürer, 1516. Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy

Apostle Philip

fact that the Master called upon them to perform this miracle is indicative of their very high stage in discipleship.

After the great transformations effected by the Pentecostal downpouring, Philip's particular work was healing. As he traveled through Asia his ministry of healing was so outstanding that vast numbers deserted their worship in the temples to follow him. In Hierapolis, Nicanora, wife of the proconsul, was cured and became his disciple. The proconsul and temple priests vowed vengeance on Philip and his companions, Marianne and Nathanael.

Nicanora's husband, declaring that she was surrounded by a light so bright and strange he dared not approach her, attributed this to sorcery and ordered the three bound and dragged into his presence. They were taken at the house of Starchys, a disciple. At the command of the priests they were to be stripped in order to find their tools of enchantment, and then hung before the temple. Crowds taunted and insulted the holy maiden Marianne, but when they tried to tear away her clothing she was enveloped in a cloud of light that

obscured her from the mob.

When Philip and Nathanael were bound to crosses, the Saviour appeared. With His hand he marked a Cross of Light descending from heaven that had the appearance of a ladder. Seeing this the people were filled with awe and attempted to release the prisoners.

Philip, knowing that his earthly span was ended, gave his blessing to Nathanael and Marianne and told them to found a church in that place, to be in the charge of Nicanora and ministered to by Starchys. "Where my blood shall drop upon the earth, a vine shall spring up and produce grapes," he continued. He was conscious of the sustaining presence of his beloved Teacher during these last hours. All physical pain was transmuted into spiritual bliss as he, in turn, comforted the disciples gathered around him. He finally passed into the higher realms while praying for his persecutors.

Marianne and Nathaniel escaped death. They cared for and buried his body with the blessing of Angels. As they were preparing these last rites a Voice from heaven was heard saying, "Philip, the Apostle, has been crowned with an incorruptible crown by Christ-Jesus."

After three days a plant sprouted from the holy blood of this Disciple. A church was established with Starchys appointed bishop. Nicanora and all the faithful assembled and never ceased glorifying God, and all the city believed on the name of Jesus. Philip often appeared to bless them, saying, "Paradise has opened to me and I have entered into the glory of Jesus."

The Book of Acts opens with a description of the Ascension. The Gospels contain the life story of Christ Jesus. Acts contains the account of the demonstration of Christed powers as they manifested in the lives of His individual followers or disciples.

The Christ delivered His teachings to the multitude; He had shown himself in glory to the five hundred. Now His last intimate touch was with the inner or esoteric group which had qualified for deeper spiritual knowledge. This group included the eleven remaining Disciples; Mary the mother; Mary Magdalene; the other holy women; Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary:

And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.—Acts 1:4, 5

This final appearance of the Christ took place in order to give those assembled instruction preparatory to their reception of the Holy Spirit.

NATHANIEL

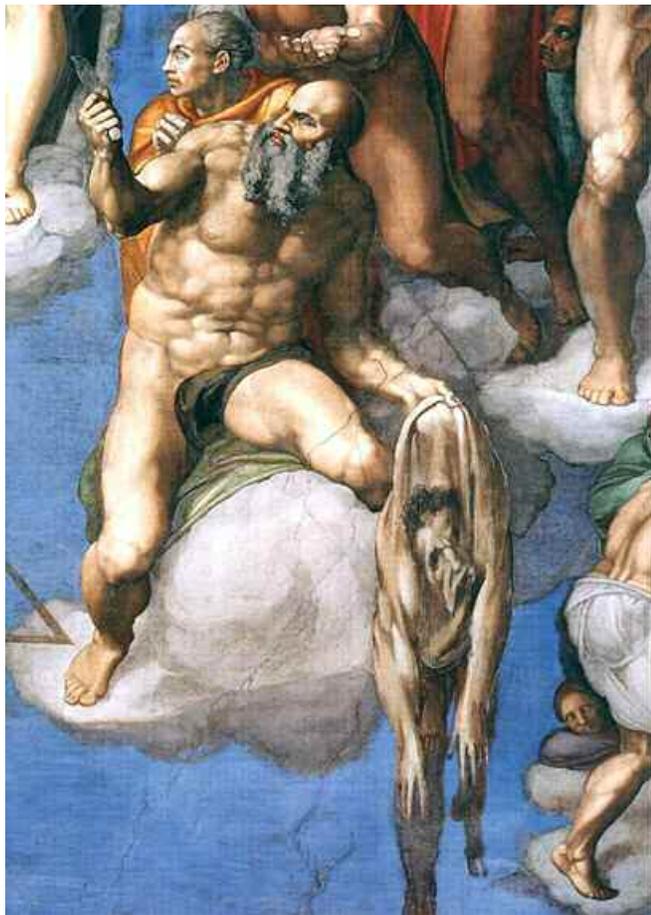
Legend says that Nathaniel, whose last name was Bartholomew, was a son of the Prince of Talmai, a family referred to by Josephus. The Christ described Nathaniel for us when He declared him to be without guile. Nathaniel was a mystic whose keynote was purity. When Philip brought him to the Great Teacher whom he had found, the first words of the Master to His new Disciple were: “When thou wast under the fig tree I saw thee.”

The fig tree symbolizes regeneration. This greeting implied that He knew of Nathaniel’s work of preparation for discipleship through the process of regeneration.

The friendship between Nathaniel and Philip may be compared to that which existed between David and Jonathan. Nathaniel Bartholomew was described as “having black hair, fair skin, and large beautiful eyes. He was of middle height, neither tall nor stunted, but middling. He wore a white undercloak bordered with purple and upon his shoulders a white cloak. His voice was like the sound of a strong trumpet.

He was accompanied by the Angels of God who never allowed him to be weary, nor to hunger or thirst. His face, his soul, and his heart were always glad and rejoicing. He foresaw all things. He knew and spoke in every tongue of every nation.”

When the Disciples dispersed after the Ascension, he and Philip travelled over many lands together. Upon the death of Philip, Nathaniel went into Ethiopia where he founded the first Christian Church. There he released the daughter of the king from the power of obsessing demons. The girl, who became one of his pupils, told her father, “He



Fresco (detail), 1534-1541, Michelangelo, Sistine Chapel, Vatican

The Last Judgment (detail)

Together with the planets and the sun, the saints surround the Judge, Christ, with identifying items. This grisly scene in Michelangelo's vast tableau depicts the figure of St. Bartholomew, on Christ's lower left, with the skin that was stripped from him when he was martyred (flayed alive). Remarkably, the skin is a self-portrait of the artist.

knows all things, speaks all languages, and is ever attended by the Angels of God.”

The king forthwith sent to Nathaniel camels loaded with gifts of gold, silver and precious stones. That very night he appeared in the king’s room and inquired of him, “Why did you send me these earthly things? My desires are no longer carnal, but are centered upon the things of heaven.”

Following the departure of Nathaniel, the king and his daughter became leaders of the Christian community in Ethiopia, where they accomplished much good for their people.

Nathaniel is said to have suffered martyrdom in Armenia by being flayed alive. □

—Corinne Heline