

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16

Go and learn what this means, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.

Matthew 9:13



In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus and his disciples are admonished for hanging out with the wrong crowd. The religious authorities of Jesus’ day criticize them for sitting with the much-loathed tax collectors and sinners. Jesus’ response: “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’” (Matthew 9:13).

I see two components in Jesus’ response. First, Jesus instructs us all to “go and learn.” Go and learn what it means to follow God in a complex and confusing world. Go and learn what it means to have one’s heart broken—and to know that you’ve broken others’ hearts, too. Go and learn what it means to have tried your best and

yet completely failed. Go and learn the names and stories of people that you have judged to be sinners.

The second part occurs once one has “gone and learned.” Once that has been done, we can begin to grasp the teaching that mercy—not sacrifice—is the hallmark of a truly faithful person. Jesus insists that a compassionate approach to life is more pleasing to God than righteous indignation and judgment.

Today’s readings

Psalms 51:1–10 | Isaiah 58:1–9a

Matthew 9:10–17

Humans judge. At some point, we have all categorized people into good and bad, pure and impure. How might we entertain curiosity—rather than judgment—toward those we have dismissed?