

Vox Populi

16 September 2026

“Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you” (Matthew 21:31).

These striking words, directed at the chief priests and elders of the Temple in Jerusalem, offer a great challenge. In Jesus’ time, tax collectors were looked down on, particularly by some of the religious leaders of the time.

“According to the concepts in vogue in Israel at that time, [a tax collector] was regarded as a public sinner,” Pope Benedict XVI said during a General Audience in 2006.

These feelings weren’t completely without merit, as tax collectors were often known to cheat or bully people out of their money.

In several parables throughout the Gospels, Jesus often compares tax collectors to the Pharisees and Sadducees. But counter to what many might think, he suggests the outward piety of the religious leaders was not sufficient, and that a repentant tax collector would have a greater chance at entering the Kingdom of Heaven than they did.

In Saint Matthew, these parables become a reality.

“In the figure of Matthew, the Gospels present to us a true and proper paradox: those who seem to be the farthest from holiness can even become a model of the acceptance of God’s mercy and offer a glimpse of its marvellous effects in their own lives,” said Pope Benedict XVI.

He walked away from a life of worldly riches, embracing a life of poverty, to follow Christ. Despite what his past may have been, and what he might have pursued in a previous life, his conversion to Christ was total.

Following Jesus’ Ascension, Matthew preached the Gospel to the Jewish community in Judea before traveling to Ethiopia to preach. He later died as a martyr for the faith.

We celebrate his feast on Monday, 21 September.

Saint Matthew, pray for us.