

Readings for Today: Acts 1: 15 – 17 (18 & 19) 20 – 26; Psalm 113 (112); John 15: 9 – 17.

I often think that it's a pity Saint Matthias has a feast-day on a particular date. It would be much better if we always celebrated him in the time between Ascension Day and Pentecost – because that's where Saint Luke places him in today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles, which is the only mention of him in Scripture.

The Lord has been lifted up and hidden from the sight of the eleven remaining apostles, leaving them with a command and a promise. They are to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit, and then to go out as witnesses to Jesus to the ends of the earth.

At a meeting of those who had come to believe in Jesus, Peter draws their attention to a gap in the number of apostles. Since the death of Judas there are only eleven – so someone must be chosen to fill the vacancy. He quotes scripture to show that this is necessary. But behind this is the unspoken assumption that there must be Twelve.

Then he sets out the qualifications: First, candidates must have been part of the band of disciples during the whole of the ministry of Jesus; and, secondly, they must be able to bear witness to his Resurrection.

Luke is telling his readers – including us – three things.

First, that the followers of Jesus are not a collection of individual believers, who just happen to meet together – they are a Church. Like God's first chosen people, the Israelites, they have a structure: As there were Twelve Patriarchs of Israel, so the Church will have Twelve Apostles – and it is they, carefully listed in the verse which precede today's reading, who will be the first to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and to begin the task committed to them by Jesus.

Secondly, their principal task is to bear witness to the Risen Jesus. That is what the apostles do in the *Acts of the Apostles*: and it's what those who join them must also do.

Thirdly, that to do this effectively they must know about the whole of the ministry of Jesus – as all the apostles, including Matthias, did – they from first-hand experience, we from our study of the scriptures.

Pray for the bishops and pastors of the Church, that they may be faithful to their calling.