

# Caravaggio's Calling of Saint Matthew

Caravaggio's *Calling of St. Matthew*, oil on canvas, c. 1599-1600 (Contarelli Chapel, San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome)

A favorite subject for Baroque artists was moments when one is going about one's everyday life, and then suddenly the divine enters into that mundane, everyday life, and everything is forever different. As we have seen, life changing moments, like conversion (think of St. Paul) or Spiritual visions (like St. Theresa) are also popular among Baroque artists.

The New Testament story, of Jesus calling Levi (later Matthew) to be his disciple is really a very simple one, but Caravaggio interprets it so richly. Here's the story from the gospel of Mark:

13 Then Jesus went out to the lakeshore again and taught the crowds that gathered around him.

14 As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at his tax-collection booth. "Come, be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Levi got up and followed him.

15 That night Levi invited Jesus and his disciples to be his dinner guests, along with his fellow tax collectors and many other notorious sinners. (There were many people of this kind among the crowds that followed Jesus.) 16 But when some of the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with people like that, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with such scum?"

17 When Jesus heard this, he told them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor--sick people do. I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough."

