

Today's reading is so surprising, and so intimately personal, that commentators have been keen to ascribe it to someone other than Matthew. They sometimes point to vocabulary used much by St Luke, and this sends them back to the document Luke and Matthew shared, which conveyed so many sayings of Jesus. Others point out that this intimate window into the heart of Jesus is most like the intimacy of the Fourth Gospel, and for this reason this passage is sometimes called "the Johannine logion", the saying from John.

I think that the reason it stands out and is so personal is that it is actually dominical, these are the Lord's own words; and we know that the disciples often kept the Lord's words safe without having the least idea what they meant, and for this reason we trust John's Gospel, even though it is written with such a loving insight into the meaning of Jesus; and that is why the words of Jesus in Matthew can sound like the words of Jesus in John.

We only have to look carefully at the positioning of this saying of the Lord to understand why Matthew has placed it here. He began his Gospel with the Genealogy and the birth-narrative, which firmly reveal to us the divine sonship of Jesus. Then he made his story of the Magi and the flight into Egypt, and the hatred of Herod and the slaughter of the innocents, and we saw at once that he wanted to show Jesus as a new and greater Moses. Jesus passes through the red sea in the shape of his baptism in the Jordan, and the desert in his temptation, tried as Moses was. Then he ascends the mountain and delivers his new Law, as Moses delivered the law on Sinai. Then we have a series of his miracles, and the beginnings of his judgment, as some believe, and some reject him. Then comes today's sudden reading. Far from mourning over his rejections, Jesus rejoices that he has been accepted, and that it is the little ones and the poor who have known him and welcomed him. When Jesus says

*No-one knows the Son except the Father,  
just as no-one knows the Father except the Son,  
and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him*

he is echoing the vital tradition that Moses was the only Israelite who was admitted to the intimacy of God. In Exodus 33 Moses prays like this:

*Moses said to Yahweh, 'Look, you say to me, "Make the people move on," but you have not told me whom you are going to send with me, although you have said, "I know you by name and you enjoy my favour."*

<sup>13</sup> *If indeed I enjoy your favour, please show me your ways, so that I understand you and continue to enjoy your favour; consider too that this nation is your people.'*

<sup>14</sup> *Yahweh then said, 'I myself shall go with you and I shall give you rest.'*

<sup>15</sup> *To which he said, 'If you do not come yourself, do not make us move on from here,*

<sup>16</sup> *for how can it be known that I and my people enjoy your favour, if not by your coming with us? By this we shall be marked out, I and your people, from all the peoples on the face of the earth.'*

<sup>17</sup> *Yahweh then said to Moses, 'Again I shall do what you have asked, because you enjoy my favour and because I know you by name.'*

<sup>18</sup> *He then said, 'Please show me your glory.'*

<sup>19</sup> *Yahweh said, 'I shall make all my goodness pass before you, and before you I shall pronounce the name Yahweh; and I am gracious to those to whom I am gracious and I take pity on those on whom I take pity.'*

<sup>20</sup> *But my face', he said, 'you cannot see, for no human being can see me and survive.'*

<sup>21</sup> *Then Yahweh said, 'Here is a place near me. You will stand on the rock,*

<sup>22</sup> *and when my glory passes by, I shall put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with my hand until I have gone past.'*

<sup>23</sup> *Then I shall take my hand away and you will see my back; but my face will not be seen.'*

When we come to tomorrow's reading we shall be promised rest; and that too will reflect the promised land to which Moses guides the people. When the Bible speaks of Moses, it will always remember him as the one God spoke to face to face. St Paul knew that this would only come for him when his life's pilgrimage was completed. "Now," he said, "we see as in a mirror, darkly; then I shall see face to face, and know, as fully as I am known."

This precious experience, I believe, was the one which sustained Jesus every moment of his life. Today's reading is therefore the most precious revelation to us of the intimacy he had with the Father. It should sustain us too, as we are permitted to enter into this sacramental meeting with the one who reflects the love of God to us, and makes it present to us on our pilgrim way.