

## ***Something a little different on The Feast of St Mathias 14th May***

'In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred and twenty persons) and said, "Friends, ..... 'Let another take his (*Judas's*) position of overseer.' So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us -- one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection."

So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed ..... And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

*From Acts 1. 15-26*



It is the Feast day of St Matthias (***see painting, left, by Simone Martini***) this Thursday, 14th May, and that, always reminds me that during my seven years ministry in Portugal his day coincided with my presiding at the service for the annual May gathering at the British Cemetery in Elvas, the fortress town on the border with Spain. The city looks across towards the Spanish city of Badajoz, just a few kilometres away and the open ground nearby where the Battle of Albuera took place on 16th May 1811.

In this fortress site, we celebrated the election of Matthias to be the replacement within 'the twelve' for Judas Iscariot, who after his betrayal of Christ had committed suicide - and we remembered too, Justus, whose name was also put forward, but who was not elected. They both qualified for the vacant place by virtue of their presence with the apostles throughout the time of Jesus' incarnation, and both were witnesses to his ministry, and could speak of him from personal experience - and most relevant, they had witnessed the resurrection.

We would visit the British cemetery twice a year, along with British folk who live in the area, visitors from the regiments involved, and representatives and dignitaries from Spain and Portugal. We went on Remembrance Day (if it was not on a Sunday) and on the anniversary of this very bloody battle, of the Peninsular War. We acknowledged the many British troops who died and who were mainly buried in the unmarked graves out on the plain. In the spring of 1812 the siege of Badajoz, was another key moment in the Peninsular War, and gave more British dead to remember - as Wellington's troops sought to push the French out of Portugal and to establish a series of border-forts, to prevent them returning.



### ***(The Storming of Badajoz)***

We who had walked across Spain, in our modern clothing and equipment, remembered the troops on both sides of the conflict as they were route-marched through the dust and heat, in their heavy red (British) and their blue (French) uniforms, carrying their full kit, not daring to fall and be punished, or left behind. At journey's end, there was no luxurious albergue, but rough camp and a battle to be fought.

And as I dwelt once more this year on the futility of that war over 200 years ago, and the thousands of troops who gave their lives, we were reminded of the events of 75 years ago of VE Day and of those killed in that grim conflict, reminded as we are by the veterans who survive.



***The British Cemetery at Elvas***

So in this difficult time we think of all who stand for office, in our church councils, and in the wider governments of our nations. And let us prayerfully remember those who, like Justus, stand but are not elected, as well as supporting those who like Matthias are. Let us also not forget the victims of all wars past and present, that peace may come to troubled hearts this day.

Some of you, like me will have read the books or watched and enjoyed the films of Bernard Cornwell's "Sharpe" (The siege of Badajoz is related - with some licence - in 'Sharpe's Eagle'). I think that version of the traditional folk song used as its theme is so relevant to the military of all ages:-

### ***'Over the Hills and far Away'***

Here's forty shillings on the drum  
For those who volunteer to come,  
To 'list and fight the foe today  
Over the Hills and far away

*Chorus - O'er the hills and o'er the main  
Through Flanders, Portugal and Spain  
King George commands and we obey  
Over the hills and far away*

Through smoke and fire and shot and shell,  
And to the very walls of hell,  
But we shall stand and we shall stay  
Over the hills and far away

*Chorus*

When duty calls me I must go  
To stand and face another foe  
But part of me will always stray  
Over the hills and far away

*Chorus*

When Evil stalks upon the land  
I'll neither hold nor stay me hand  
But fight to win a better day,  
Over the hills and far away.

*Chorus*

If I should fall to rise no more  
As many comrades did before  
Then ask the fifes and drums to play  
Over the hills and far away

*Chorus*

Then fall in lads behind the drum  
With colours blazing like the sun  
Along the road to come what may  
Over the hills and far away

*Chorus*

Though I may travel far from Spain  
A part of me shall still remain,  
And you are with me night and day  
and Over the hills and far away.

*Chorus*

### **Collect -**

*Almighty God, who in the place of the traitor Judas chose your faithful servant Matthias to be of the number of the Twelve: preserve your Church from false apostles and, by the ministry of faithful pastors and teachers, keep us steadfast in your truth; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen*

### **Prayer for VE Day -**

*Lord God our Father, we pledge ourselves to serve you and all humankind, in the cause of peace, for the relief of want and suffering, and for the praise of your name. Guide us by your Spirit; give us wisdom; give us courage; give us hope; and keep us faithful now and always. Amen.*

### **A Time of prayer**

At this time of continued uncertainty, we pray for so much, but in particular for our Camino Chaplains as they offer their thoughts and deliberations here over the weeks to come. We pray for Sybille and all those in Spain as the Covid 19 restrictions are modified and for the church in Spain, and those whose livelihood depends on the Camino. We pray for those who remember those who gave their lives for their country in so many past conflicts, and those who do so today.

**Please allow us to pray for - You**, your family, your congregation, your exploration of new ways of ministry in difficult times - the things on your heart this day. May the Christ who defies the rules of social distancing walk closely with you, now and always.

God has called us to journey for a season through the wilderness places;  
**And so, as Jesus did before us, we will set out once more to wander in an uncomfortable landscape and wrestle with its challenges, that through the tempering action of the Spirit, we may emerge ready to do the work of the Kingdom.**

**Blessing**

God the Father, by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead strengthen you to walk with him in his risen life and the blessing of Almighty God Father Son and Holy Spirit Be with you as you continue your Camino- and for all time

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