

The Canaanite Woman  
08/20/17

Today's readings are all about getting along. Author A. L. Mahoney reminds us, they look beyond division and mistrust, revealing a world where the kingdom of God is big enough to welcome everyone. Wherever hatred and narrow-mindedness and prejudice come from, they clearly do not come from God, who embraces all people.

The exchange in the Gospel between Jesus and a woman is startling to say the least, for He has no business even acknowledging her. She is first of all a Canaanite, a foreigner of sorts. And on top of that, she's a woman. Rabbis weren't supposed to speak to women, at least not in public, unless the woman was the Rabbi's wife. And if that weren't bad enough, the woman is bold enough to persist in her debate with Jesus.

This Gospel exchange is a good reminder for all of us to consider who the Canaanite woman is in our lives? And if truth be told, we all have our Canaanite women. Fr. Steve Rosetti suggests all of us have our own communities where we feel comfortable, whether the community is based on skin color, social class, gender, nationality or religious affiliation. But are these of ultimate importance? He thinks not. What matters more is if we can look beyond our own group or groups and marvel at the faith of others.

In the latest issue of America magazine, editor in chief, Jesuit Matt Malone recalls the tragic events of 9/11. But he does not remember them as an American but more so as a Christian. After all, the Bible tells us not to hate our neighbor, to remember the Most High's covenant, and overlook faults. Even though he is reflecting on the events of 9/11, we don't have to look too far back to see the difficulty he raises in overlooking someone's faults, to forgive in the name of Jesus. Or maybe it would be better put that we are to forgive for the love of God.

How is it possible to forgive those who with cruel intention and without regret committed the mass murder of thousands of innocents on that fateful day? More recently, we can ask ourselves how we can

possibly forgive those who drive vehicles into crowds of people in the name of some distorted sense of religion or ideology. Malone questions the how of forgiveness. Then he says words that are stinging in their bluntness.

He says that what is clear is that Jesus Himself asks us, no commands us, to forgive these people. Remember Jesus said we are to forgive not only those we love but especially the people we do not love. He uses the Book of Sirach to make his point. In that book we are told that wrath and anger are hateful things. In other words, we forgive to free our souls from the wrath and anger that lead to death. And we forgive because it is the ultimate act of justice.

He goes on to say that our faith is the faith that does forgiveness. And even if those who have offended do not ask for our forgiveness, forgiveness is still powerful enough to transform our own hearts, to convert us from hatred to love, from fear to faith. But this radical life-changing forgiveness seems impossible, doesn't it? However, we must remember that God does not ask us to do what is impossible; we must remember we cannot do the difficult work of forgiveness without His help.

We pray to see our enemies as our neighbors; we pray to see them as God sees them. We pray, we plead if we must, for some share in just a tiny bit of God's infinite love and mercy. Malone also suggests that forgiveness is our only hope; it is the only way out. He says that 9/11, in all its horror, was just one day in history's long rampage of war and destruction. And now we can add Berlin and Paris and Barcelona and Charlottesville to the growing list of carnage that has taken place.

Malone concludes by saying that if we believe that we will escape this vicious cycle of violence without the radical acts of love and forgiveness to which the Gospel testifies and Christ commands us, then we are simply fooling ourselves. For forgiveness is the final measure of our love for one another.

Dr. Martin Luther King once said that "We must learn to live together as brothers and sisters or perish together as fools." I would add that we must not only learn to live together but also to love together or in the end, we will indeed perish at the hands of our hatred and our fear.