

August 17, 2008 – Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
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Isaiah 56:1, 6-7	My house shall be called a house of prayer for all
Psalms 67:2-3 ,5 ,6 ,8	May all the peoples praise you, O God.
Romans 11:13-15, 29-32	God's gifts and call are irrevocable.
Matthew 15:21-28	Woman, you have great faith! Your wish will come to pass

“Woman, you have great faith; your wish will come to pass.” Jesus spoke these words 2,000 years ago to the foreigner, the non-Jew, a Canaanite woman who met him while he was traveling in the area of Tyre and Sidon, now in modern day Lebanon. And he healed her daughter. I thought these same words some 45 years ago when as a new missionary in Hong Kong I asked a “grandma,” a very poor refugee at that time with no education or job, why she wanted to be baptized. She simply replied: “Because I want to believe that God really loves me, and this is almost too wonderful to believe.” This woman reminded me of the good news that God’s total and unconditional love is a gift to each and every person, to all creatures. It seems that Canaanite woman also helped Jesus of Nazareth know that God, his Abba Father, is the loving God of all peoples, Jews and Canaanites alike.

This message of total inclusion is the background music of those parts of Hebrew scriptures which focused on calling the Jews to bring God to other peoples rather than forget God in their attempts to be like the other peoples in security, power and prestige.

The inclusion background music became the dominant theme of the Christian scriptures. The Church, as people of God, is called to go out to all the nations, to be a sign of salvation for all. However, like some of our Jewish ancestors, past and present, we too have at times acted as if God’s love were restricted only to us, to Catholics, like in Roman Catholics rather than small “c” catholic, like in universal.

And now our whole world is beginning to hear the same background music, the same inclusion message from a third source; not only the written word and teachings of the Hebrew scriptures that Jesus studied, cherished and lived, not only the Gospels and epistles of Christian scripture, studied, cherished and lived by the followers of Jesus, but from words written into our very lives on this earth.

Though the lens of our recent scientific instruments and research we are learning again what the poets and mystics have always known: that we are all one, that we are all interconnected, that God is totally in all, that no creature exists outside of God, that no creature is superior or better than another, that we live together in harmony or slowly destroy each other with our entitlements, exclusion of other creatures, and abuse of God’s other creatures. The universe story is our story.

All of creation, the cosmos, the universe is the most basic revelation of our ever creating, loving God. This creation history of God’s love is at least 13.7 billion years old. We are discovering that the universe is the Holy Land, the earth is the Holy City, living creatures are the temples, churches, mosques in which God is revealed. As Christians we believe that the Kingdom of God, proclaimed and revealed in Jesus Christ is in our midst, already here, and still emerging in, through and with us.

This background music now has a choir, clear voices singing words we human creatures must hear lest we become discordant and no longer part of the music, no longer creatures of an earth that will survive without us, if necessary.

The air is saying: respect me, stop polluting me with your fossil fumes. I am your living breath; without me and all other breathing creatures, you cannot live.

The water is saying: respect me; stop pouring your wastes into my streams, rivers, seas and oceans; without me and all the creatures of the waters, you cannot live.

The soil is saying: respect me; stop degrading me with your waste; without me you have no food, no safe place to live.

We are hearing anew in these voices a today response of Jesus to the question: “Who is my neighbor?” The fragile atmosphere of the earth, the dying waters of the earth, the soil become toxic and unable to grow food for all creatures; these also are the least of our sisters and brothers. And whatever we do to them, we do to Jesus Christ, God among us.

The choir singing these verses is still small; it is made up now of those feeling most the results of our polluted air, dying waters, and degraded soil; it is made up of the poor of our country and the world and the immigrant leaving home to find hope. It is made up of those who work but cannot afford a living; those who are ill but cannot afford medicines and medical care; those who are hungry but cannot grow or buy food; those who ancestral land can no longer support them, but who are not welcomed anywhere else. And this choir of the poor is growing.

We Catholics of the United States are privileged with the opportunity to vote in November for our own leaders. We are being called to listen to the inclusion message of today’s readings, to extend our founding message that all men, women in our country and our world are created equal in the sight and love of God. We are being called to cast our votes for our brothers and sisters who seem to best hear the message of today’s readings; who promise most to hear the choir of the poor rather than the self interest of the few; who give the best indication that they hear the inclusion music played in creation, the message of Jesus, and all the people of God; who will have the courage to respect our air, water and soil, and empower us in this country to be part of the human leadership bring hope and a just future for all women and men of the earth, and to all creatures revealing God’s presence and love among us.

Jesus healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman because she believed, hoped and persisted. May we people of the United States help heal our world with the love, wisdom and compassion of Jesus because we also believe, hope, act and vote. God bless us all, in this parish, in our country, and in this world of ours.

For more information

Lower consumption levels and the value of sufficiency are needed to bring society back into harmony with all of creation. Just and realistic government policy will be required to set the direction. Read more about the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions in Maryknoll’s “Loving our neighbor in a shrinking world,” a resource developed by Maryknoll missionaries who witness the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions. Through this resource Maryknoll missionaries encourage voters in the 2008 elections to scrutinize candidates’ policy proposals through the lens of those who both in the U.S. and overseas lack basic necessities endure the scourge of racism live with gender-based discrimination or feel the immediate impact of climate change.

Email for a copy, or find the election guide here:
www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm

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