On his very first trip outside Rome, Pope Francis called attention to our “catholicity.” There on a beautiful Sicilian island known for its illegal immigrants from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, our Papa commemorated all those who had died fleeing for a better life. Listen to the words he prayed and tweeted: “Lord, we beg forgiveness for our indifference to so many of our brothers and sisters.”1 “God will judge us upon how we have treated the most needy.”2

Pope Francis drew our attention to the plight of illegal immigrants again last month. This time he spoke about the increasing numbers of children migrating to the US from Mexico and Central America. He said, “This humanitarian emergency requires, as a first urgent measure, these children be welcomed and protected.”3

Christian persecution is not just another crisis but one of the largest classes of human rights violations in the world today. Last month we saw scores of Christians forced from their homes in the city of Mosul, Iraq. In their wake, terrorists destroyed the tombs of Daniel and Jonah, prophets revered by both Christians and Muslims. Mosul had risen from the ashes of the ancient city of Ninevah, where Jonah went in obedience to the word of Yahweh.45

No matter where we turn today, an unprecedented number of humanitarian crises encircle our globe. 6 Syria. Iraq. South Sudan. Nigeria. Pakistan. Burma. The United States. Estimates for our real unemployment rate range from 13-18%.7 8

One child of God after another hoping beyond hope that help is on the way. But is anybody listening? Is anybody doing anything to help?

The pagan woman in Matthew’s Gospel knew that her cries for mercy could fall on deaf ears. She was a Canaanite after all, who worshiped many gods in fertility-laden rituals. She knew her pagan status would never equal to Jesus’ stature of Lord, let alone Lord of the House of David. But her conviction in Jesus’ power to heal was not to be denied. She comes forward, kneels respectfully to Jesus, and again uses the honorific title “Lord.” Her plea is simple and moving: “Help me.”

Her unpretentious and persistent actions in a sense perform a ministry to Jesus. She becomes a model for all those beyond Jesus’ mission who stake their claim on the mercy and generosity of God. While some minister to Jesus by providing him with food or shelter, this Canaanite woman ministers to Jesus by rallying his movement beyond the lost sheep of Israel.
This woman shows us - like the Magi (MT 2:1-12) and the centurion (MT 8:5-14) - a glimpse of God’s all-inclusive intentions of what is to come after Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection.

And just as the woman ministers to Jesus, Jesus ministers to the woman, extending God’s mercy to her. The spoken word effects the cure. “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” Her demon-possessed child is healed immediately. The Son of David has brought wholeness to a Gentile daughter.

Today’s scripture readings and the many global humanitarian emergencies are calling our attention to the very meaning of our catholicity: what it means to help the needy, welcome the foreigner, and make a house of prayer for all peoples. This is no mere coincidence my brothers and sisters! The Holy Spirit is alive and inviting us to God’s ever expanding circle of grace!

Our faith holds no allegiance to any political, economic or social system. Like the prophets gone before us, we are being called to bring harmony to humanity according to the divine law of our Creator, by promoting the dignity of every person... Muslims and other non-Israelites alike.

Now I admit these turbulent and violent days leave many of us with feelings of helplessness, fear, and anger. How in the world can you and I bring Christian witness of mercy to the poor and needy, the victim and the exiled?

1. **Pray unceasingly** for our Church, governments, the persecuted, the terrorists, everyone!
2. **Sacrifice your time and talents** to support humanitarian organizations working directly on the ground. Like Catholic Relief Services, our official international humanitarian agency.
3. **Raise awareness.** Sit down with friends, classmates, and coworkers and talk to them. Then share through social media and encourage folks to contact politicians, public figures and others and request life-giving actions.

My brothers and sisters, we haven’t been created to decide who’s part of the Body of Christ and who’s not - who’s in and who’s out. You see we live in a society of diverse races, cultures, and religions. We don’t know how God will make his house a “house of prayer for all peoples.” It certainly won’t be by reversing the course of history. Instead we need to look to Paul, who went far and wide on his journeys relying solely on God and especially God’s mercy, and look to the Canaanite woman, who by her faith participated in the means of God’s grace to others. “For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.”

So let us approach the Eucharistic table seeking to expand our ability to love and pursue justice. Let us be transformed to respond generously, like the Blessed Virgin Mary, in
service and fidelity to our God. And let us leave here as Catholics freely offering all humanity the mercy freely gifted to us by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Tom di Stefano
Permanent Deacon
St. John Neumann Catholic Church
Catholic Diocese of Richmond

© Copyright - T. di Stefano – 2014. All rights reserved. No reproduction without permission.


2 [https://twitter.com/Pontifex/status/354180232221171712](https://twitter.com/Pontifex/status/354180232221171712)


These are the people without jobs; those who would like to work but have become discouraged; and those working fewer hours than they need to.
