

## Reflection

Feast of St Anthony of Padua

King 21:1 – 16

Annette St. Amore

Matthew 5:38-21

As we commemorate the feast of St Anthony, we are aware that besides helping find lost articles, Anthony Padua was known to be a great preacher. Today we can ask that he help all our homilists share his gift of inspiring people with his words and his ability to move people to action so needed in our world at this time.

As we ponder today's scriptures, what a juxtaposition of stories we find there! The first story of King Ahab and his wife Jezebel and secondly, the words of Jesus urging us to "turn the other cheek" in the face of attack. We see two opposite responses.

As I first read the passage from the Book of Kings, my heart grew heavier, so aware of the many injustices and power grabs in our world, in our own country, in the lives of the poor and marginalized people. There is no real **relationship** if people can grab what belongs to another. It is "stuff" or owning property that is their focus, not what it does to a person, nor to the consequences or circumstances that follow. It is not the person nor their lives that count. There is no thought of relationship between a king and his people or with a neighbor.

Yesterday on the feast of the Trinity was an invitation to reflect on relationships which are a gift, a grounded connection with God, self, others, and the Earth Community.

For Ahab, his bad mood was caused by greed for the land of his neighbor, like a spoiled child wanting something and not able to obtain it, not seeing beyond the immediate satisfaction. For Naboth, on the other hand, his concern was the ancient responsibility of preserving his family heritage as the book of Leviticus exhorted. Land should be sold only within the family. Without property, a family's name could not survive in Israel. Naboth was loyal to his tradition. His relationship with his ancestors and coming generations took priority as far as his property was concerned. He could not let go, even to the King.

In the gospels, we see that Jesus began with the foundation of the tradition of his people, the laws given to them, but from there leading to a new showing a new dimension of the Kingdom of God.

Why did Jesus take such a leap in this new directive—to turn the other cheek; to offer no resistance to even one who is evil? Not only to give in to what the person wants, but to go the extra mile, to go beyond what was asked for. Why? How could this be done. We can ask this considering situations and issues we face in our world today.

Again, it is about relationships. Focus on our rights and justice *alone*, could cause us to separate from our sisters and brothers. This exhortation of Jesus was given to prevent undue punishment upon one another, unceasing resentment, retaliation, conflict – so difficult to live out in the everyday.

We witnessed that over and over in South Sudan with the constant tendency of some in the community to steal cattle from their neighbors, especially those of a different clan or tribe. Or the revenge killings that went on in families from generation to generation until someone or a group stand up against revenge.

We witnessed the courage of the women's group in the town of Rumbek to stand together against revenge. We heard how they intervened when someone had been killed in a family. They went to the home and pleaded that the family forgive and not retaliate. They were living the exhortation of Jesus to go the extra mile. How does this happen? Not alone, not by our own power. Jesus could declare the Law of Love because he gave us his Spirit, the Holy Spirit to guide us and to act in us, beyond our own abilities. Justice is needed, however, always with the perspective of relationships. How? With much discernment and searching, for balance of justice and love. What is the step beyond to which we are called to today? It is the Spirit that must lead us, in small things and in large issues.