

**Reflection on the Gospel-26th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B
(Mark 9:38-48)**

-Veronica M. Lawson RSM

Sometimes we act and speak as though we have the monopoly on access to the power of God although we have no such monopoly. In today's gospel Jesus seems to be telling his disciples that God works through people of good will, irrespective of whether they are on the edge ("not one of us") or at the centre of the kingdom of God movement. Much the same message is found in the first reading from the Book of Numbers which has Joshua, assistant to Moses, trying to exclude two men from prophesying on somewhat tenuous grounds.

Moses does not take Joshua's advice. On the contrary, he prays that the Spirit of God might "rest on" and, by implication, work through all of God's people. Both the gospel passage and the reading from Numbers seem to be warning against attempts to control or domesticate the Spirit of God. The second part of the gospel reading (9:42-48) brings a dramatic change of mood as it takes up the issue of scandalising the "little ones". The reference to "little ones" marks a return to the scene in the latter part of last week's gospel reading where Jesus takes a little child in his arms and instructs his disciples.

The horror of harming the little ones is dramatised in a series of sayings that challenge the most vivid imagination. These sayings are hardly intended to be taken literally. Cutting off offending limbs only deals with the symptoms. It may, however, offer some solace to those little ones who have suffered "scandal" or worse to know that there is no stronger condemnation in the gospels than that reserved for those who bring harm to children and to vulnerable others. We are impelled to do everything in our power to heal the hurts of the past and to create conditions that ensure the protection and safety of our children.

The provision of secure and affordable housing for vulnerable families is one response to this gospel challenge. Today is Social Justice Sunday in Australian Catholic communities. In their choice of title for the 2018-2019 Social Justice Statement, the Australian bishops remind us that everyone needs a place to call home. The escalating cost of housing and of rental properties has accelerated the problem of homelessness. Homelessness, they insist, "is a challenge for all levels of society: for government, for Church and community, and for us as individuals. Each one of us can make a difference and, when we join with others, we can be a real force for change..." To take up the challenge of addressing homelessness is to accept the invitation of Pope Francis to live the eighth work of mercy. It involves imagination and industry. It means visualising new possibilities and engaging in simple daily gestures that have the potential to bring life to the "little ones" of this world.