

**Reflection on the Gospel-29th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B
(Mark 10:35-45)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

In the kingdom of God movement established by Jesus, there is no place for domination or for any exercise of power over others. In today's gospel story, this is a lesson that James and John, the sons of Zebedee, clearly need to learn. They seem to think that the structures of power operating in the Roman world are going to be replicated when Jesus conquers the forces of opposition and comes into his "glory". The two brothers, James and John, put in a bid for shared deputy leadership positions. They seem to be blind and deaf to what Jesus has been trying to tell them throughout their journey from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem. They seek his patronage without reference to the rest of the leadership group who, incidentally, are not well pleased with their presumptuous companions.

James and John do not yet realise that Jesus' way is not the way of status or entitlement and that their call as disciples and as leaders of the emerging movement has nothing to do with privilege. They need to understand that it has more to do with enduring the suffering associated with commitment to one's mission, and with setting others free to be their best selves. To demonstrate this, Jesus offers them an unpalatable alternative: to "be slave of all". He sustains the slavery metaphor and goes on to summarise his own mission with an image that comes out of the world of his time: "not to be served but to serve and give life as a ransom for many". A ransom was the payment made to free someone from slavery. To substitute oneself for a slave was to give one's life as a ransom for that slave. Reading the gospel from beginning to end helps us to understand the ultimate self-giving of Jesus in death as the climax of a lifetime's outpouring of love, a love that draws forth loving and liberating action in others.

There are multiple ways of enslaving others, of dominating and of trying to control them in order to achieve one's own personal or corporate ends, good or bad. The request of James and John reminds us that we can all lose sight of the liberating vision of the gospel and get caught up in destructive power struggles. As 21st century disciples, we hear the words of Jesus, 'It is not to happen with you'. We might turn our attention to those in our world who are literally enslaved. We might join with ACRATH (Australian Catholic Religious against the Trafficking in Humans) or with others working to obtain freedom and justice for those trapped into sexual and other forms of slavery in our own cities. We might hear today's gospel as a call to do something about this tragic phenomenon.