

**Reflection on the Gospel-23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time C  
(Luke 14:25-33)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

On June 17 this year, the Vatican's Dicastery for Integral Human Development issued a letter about the Season of Creation. It noted that during this season Christians across six continents work to put into practice Pope Francis' encyclical on integral ecology, *Laudato Si'*, and "participate in community events to deepen their love for Creator, creation, and each other". As we move into the second week of the Season of Creation, we might renew our commitment to the gospel call to reverence for all that constitutes our planetary home.

As we turn to the gospel reading for today, we are confronted by the pain involved in living a way of life that respects the rights of all created beings. On the long journey from Galilee through Samaritan territory to the city of Jerusalem, Jesus attracts a huge following and teaches relentlessly about the ways of God. By the time he reaches Jerusalem, the crowds have thinned considerably. Is this because it is too hard to persist with their initial impulse to follow the way of the gospel and the one who embodies its values? Implicit in Jesus' teaching about carrying one's cross is a reminder of the intense pain and sacrifice involved in being a disciple. It sometimes means going against what other family members want. It may even involve risking one's life for the sake of others. In the context of the Roman Empire, criminals who were sentenced to die by crucifixion carried to the place of their execution the cross beam on which they would hang. The cross image is thus shocking for anyone. It is quite alienating for the faint hearted.

The term "hate" (*misein*) in this context seems harsh. The English translation fails to do justice, however, to the original Greek or to the Hebrew that underlies this biblical notion. To "hate" in biblical terms is to "leave aside". Disciples are expected to love one another. There are times, however, when they have to "leave aside" the wishes of those they love most for the sake of a gospel call to justice, compassion, and right relationship. If we are attentive to the gender bias of this ancient text, we might note that married men are addressed while married women are not. Here as elsewhere, women have to read against the grain of the text in order to hear its message. Finally, there is a call in this gospel passage to "leave aside" unnecessary possessions. In a time of planetary vulnerability and of growing division between the privileged and the marginalised of the Earth community, the teaching of the Lukan Jesus has a particular resonance. There is no place in a gospel way of life for self-indulgence, for exploitation of others, or for self-centred appropriation of the goods of the earth.