

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

-Veronica M. Lawson RSM

Sometimes we act and speak as though we humans have the monopoly on access to the power of God even if, in fact, 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 kin-dom of God movement. Much the same message is found in the first reading from the Book of Numbers which has Joshua trying, on somewhat tenuous grounds, to exclude two men from prophesying.

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 dramatized in a series of sayings that challenge the most vivid of imaginations. 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. We are likewise impelled to heal the hurts affecting tiny creatures like the bees that are so crucial for life in our common home.

The provision of secure and affordable housing for vulnerable families is one possible response to today's gospel challenge. The restoration of habitat where fire has ravaged the land is yet another response. As we move into the final week of the Season of Creation (September 1-October 4), we recall the 2021 theme, "A Home for All". Every creature needs a home. The escalating cost of housing and of rental properties has accelerated the problem of homelessness in the human community. The climate crisis has accelerated the loss of habitat for countless other species. 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 "daily gestures" that have the potential to bring life to the "little ones" of this world, the human and the other-than-human.