

**Reflection on the Gospel-25th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B
(Mark 9:30-37)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Most of us have to admit to being like the disciples whom Jesus was trying to bring from blindness and ignorance to insight and understanding. Like them, we are often afraid to ask for explanations when we fear that we may not be able to deal with the responses we receive. We so often choose to live in denial. No matter how strongly Jesus insists that the way of the gospel will lead to his violent death, his closest followers persist in their refusal to accept the inevitability of suffering in the life of one who so openly challenges abuses of power.

More focussed on personal recognition and status, the “twelve” engage in a childish argument about who is the greatest among them. They are inside “the house” in Capernaum, the home of Jesus. They are understandably silent when Jesus questions them about the discussion they had “on the way”. They have much to learn and he needs their attention if they are to understand who he is and what it means to be his disciple. They need to learn that being first has nothing to do with seeking the limelight, with hierarchy or status, with power or adulation. It has everything to do with engaging in ministry without distinction or discrimination, with being “servant of all”. Like us, they may also have much to learn from “the way” itself, the path they tread through the land.

An engaging scene follows this discussion. They are “inside the house”, an open house where all are welcome. Jesus places a child in their midst. The child is unnamed. We might give this child a name so that she or he is a real person for us. Jesus seemingly gathers the twelve in a circle around him. Taking the child in his arms, he tries to show them that gospel leadership resides, not in privilege, but in the welcome offered to those whose voices are rarely heard and whose needs are frequently ignored.

Jesus, the suffering Messiah, actually identifies with a defenceless child, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me”. His identification with the defenceless is as intimate as his identification with God, “the one who sent me”. As a church, we might well hear today’s gospel story as a call to respond with compassion and justice to those who have suffered the indignity and injustice of abuse in their childhood. We might hear it as an invitation to listen to the cry of our sisters and brothers who continue to seek the dignity and justice that belong to all of God’s people. We might learn from the five high profile Australians, the “filthy rich and homeless”, who lived for a time with the nation’s most vulnerable and called us all to commit to ways of being that might enable all to live in dignity and hope.