

**Reflection on the Gospel-5th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B
(Mark 1:29-39)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

In Australia, Sunday of the Word of God is celebrated this weekend. It comes at a time when our planetary community is in need of deep healing. It invites us to bring the distress of the Earth community into dialogue with the gospel. In the first century Mediterranean world, sickness was attributed to social rather than to physical causes. The corollary of this was that healing focussed principally on restoration of the person to her or his place or status in the society or community. Healing of an individual brought not only the person but the community itself to wholeness.

Last Sunday, we reflected on the “healing” of a man with an “unclean spirit”. Jesus, healer and teacher, expelled the unclean spirit and thus restored health to the man as well as to the worshipping community. The healing took place in the Capernaum synagogue on the Sabbath. This story began Mark’s account of a typical day in Jesus’ ministry. Today’s gospel passage continues that account. Jesus leaves the synagogue and moves, in the company of two of his new disciples, to the house of Simon and Andrew. In other words, he shifts from a long established gathering place for God’s people to a prospective new locus of communal engagement, the house church. This new locus does not preclude the older locus: Jesus continues to teach and heal in the synagogues throughout Galilee.

In this new place of encounter with God, Jesus heals a woman with a “fever” who is identified only in relation to her son-in-law, Simon. Jesus takes her by the hand and raises her up. She is the first human character in the Markan gospel story who is said to “minister”. In other words, the love of God working through Jesus draws her beyond herself to engage in a ministry of leadership in the community of God’s people. Earlier in Mark’s gospel we heard that angels “ministered” to Jesus in the desert. In other words, God looked after Jesus as he began his mission of bringing God’s love into a broken world. Jesus will later insist that he came “to minister” (10:45). This woman is caught up in the same mission of bringing the community to health and wholeness.

That same evening, Simon’s house becomes a magnet for “the whole city”. Jesus heals their sick and afflicted and, early in the morning, seeks the solitude of a “desert” place for prayer. The disciples seek him out, as everyone is looking for him. Jesus makes it clear that he must move on and bring God’s word and healing beyond the city to the neighbouring Galilean towns. God’s word in this gospel story is for us as well as for those early disciples. Amid all the troubles besetting our world, we too must search out the solitude of a “desert” place for prayer, and engage with renewed energy and insight in whatever each new day brings.