

**Reflection on the Gospel-15th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B
(Mark 6:7-13)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

To be a disciple of Jesus is to experience a call. It is also to be sent on a mission in partnership with others, a mission invariably expressed in terms of preaching, teaching, healing, and/or driving out of demons or unclean spirits. In other words, it is to be authorised to do what Jesus did and to proclaim what he proclaimed. When we hear of Jesus casting out demons and telling his disciples to do likewise, we tend to think that whatever they did is something that belongs to another time and has little to do with our contemporary society.

In the cosmology of the time, there was a realm between the divine and the human that was inhabited by good and evil spirits (angels and demons). The divide between these realms was conceptualised as porous so that humans could be protected by the angels or “possessed” by the demons. While the cosmology of the twenty-first century has no “place” for such beings, the contemporary imagination allows space for a metaphorical engagement with the angelic and demonic. When we speak of “demons” now, we are talking about something recognisable in human experience, even if somewhat removed from the “demons” that beset the poor in the Roman imperial provinces of the first century.

Today’s parents spend much of their time casting out the “demons” that beset their children, as do our friends when they sit and listen to the pain in our hearts and help us to let go of the “demons” that so often inhabit our psyches. Many health professionals are paid to heal the hurts as well as the cuts and burns. They drive out the demons of fear and hate and prejudice and of paralysing mental illness. Educators also, aware that learning occurs only when students are relatively free from fear and anxiety, know what it means to drive out the demons.

It is significant that Jesus instructs the disciples to travel light. They need the basics to live and to do their job, but if their mission is to be effective, they must be free from the anxiety that comes from excess. Psychologist and social critic John F. Schumacher suggests that societies with the most material goods tend to be the most anxious. “Mutual respect, community-mindedness, an eagerness to share, reverence for nature, thankfulness and love of life”, it seems, are the major ingredients for a stress- or “demon”-free personal and community life. There would be no need to shake the dust from our feet for want of hospitality if that were the way we all chose to live. What’s more, there would be enough for all on our planet, the human and other-and-human, to live in dignity and peace. The experience of Covid-19 has been devastating in so many ways. While the only way out is widespread vaccination, many are fearful and anxious of being vaccinated. To allay the fears in our neighbours and friends is to live the gospel at this time.