

**Reflection on the Gospel-Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A  
(Matthew 14:13-21)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Rising fuel and food prices affect us all. Not everyone, however, considers the effect that life-style choices and agricultural practices in the developed world might have on the rest of the world's population. In 2003, the FAO (the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization) instigated a series of consultations on climate change and bioenergy leading to a high level 'Food Summit' in Rome on world food security. Representing some 180 countries as well as the European Union, it adopted a *Declaration on World Food Security: the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy*. In brief, the declaration urged the maintaining of biodiversity and called for greater investment in food and agriculture research. It called for a reduction in trade barriers and market distorting policies, as well international dialogue on biofuels. Although there was less progress on the biofuel issue than the organizers had anticipated, the plight of the world's hungry people seemed to be firmly on the global agenda. A decade or so later, climate change and its effects are more widely accepted, but the will to act decisively to halt its progress or to mitigate its effects remains a serious global and local challenge.

What has this to do with our gospel reflection? In the first reading from Isaiah, God tells the 'thirsty': 'Listen and delight in rich food....Incline your ear, and come to me; listen that you may live'. The gospel reading from Matthew tells a story of hungry people 'hearing', following Jesus, and enjoying an abundance of life-sustaining food. In other words, Matthew presents Jesus as the one who makes God's transformative dream a reality for those who hunger and thirst both literally and figuratively. The passage echoes key aspects of Israel's history. Jesus retreats to a 'desert' place, recalling the experience of God's people in the wilderness of Sinai. Those who follow Jesus find life-restoring food in the desert, recalling the manna that God provided for the hungry in the Sinai desert.

Jesus has compassion for people struggling with disease and thirsting for the means to live. In biblical terms, compassion is always accompanied by action for restorative justice. Jesus heals the sick and creates a structure for the sharing of resources. Faced with a hungry crowd, the disciples offer a simple solution: 'Send them away.' Jesus refuses their solution and invites them instead to take some personal responsibility for the situation. The gospel invites us to attend to food security in our world. Informing ourselves on the issues might be a place to begin.