

**Reflection on the Gospel-13<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time C  
(Luke 9:51-62)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Gary Cohen's film, *Judah & Mohammad*, depicts the separate lives and education of two teenage school boys, one a Jewish Israeli and the other a Palestinian Arab. Judah and Mohammad have never met and are unlikely ever to do so. Geographically they are near neighbours, but their lives are separated by a "security wall" that keeps them and their people effectively separated and suspicious of each other, despite the desire for peace of many on both sides of the wall. Sandy Tolán's heart-wrenching novel, *The Lemon Tree*, tells a similar story of women on either side of the divide. Both stories reflect a contemporary story of violent conflict and hostility. That is more or less how it was between Jews and Samaritans in the first century, although the hostility in that instance had endured for centuries.

A gracious welcome for Jesus and his friends could hardly have been expected in that climate, although it seems they would have been welcomed had Jesus planned to stay and worship in the temple on Mt. Gerizim, the centre of Samaritan life and worship. The problem for the Samaritans is his decision to use Samaritan territory simply as a staging post on his journey to Jerusalem, the centre of Jewish life and worship. The Samaritans "did not receive him because his face was set towards Jerusalem".

The Galilean Jewish disciples James and John have an excessively violent reaction to the unwelcoming Samaritans: "Do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" The force of this question can easily be lost. James and John have heard Jesus telling them to love their enemies, to do good to those who hate them, bless those who curse them, and pray for those who mistreat them (6:28-28). And yet they want to call down fire on those who do not receive him. Jesus makes it clear that violence is not the way of God's prophet, even in the face of rejection. He has no word of condemnation for the villagers who failed to receive him but simply moves on to another village. The text simply says that he turns and rebukes his two disciples.

There is a sense of relentlessness in this gospel passage. Jesus has "set his face to Jerusalem" and there is no turning back for him or for those who join him on the journey. Jesus, in the company of his disciples, now moves inexorably to Jerusalem where he will be "lifted up" in death and exaltation. Bringing the good news of God's kingdom is the purpose of the journey. We are invited to enter into that journey with all its demands and deprivations. There is no room on this journey, it seems, for clinging to familiar securities.