

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

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Today's gospel passage invites us to consider the meaning of service. It continues Mark's account of a typical day in Jesus' ministry. The setting is Capernaum. Jesus has just left the synagogue where he has freed a man who had been caught in the power of "an unclean spirit." He moves, in the company of two of his new disciples, from the synagogue to the house of Simon and Andrew. In other words, he shifts from a long established gathering place for God's people, the synagogue, to a prospective new locus of communal engagement, the house. 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 who is identified only in relation to her son-in-law, Simon. Jesus takes her by the hand and raises her up. She may not be named, but she is the first human character in the Markan gospel story said to "minister" or "serve". In other words, the love of God working through Jesus draws her beyond herself to engage in a ministry of caring for God's people. A little earlier in Mark's gospel we heard that angels ministered to Jesus in the desert: in other words God looked after Jesus as he embarked on his mission of bringing God's love into a broken world. Now this woman is caught up in the same mission. Mark is beginning to provide a new definition of the way the world works. Later in the gospel, we find that Jesus understands his own mission in terms of ministry or service: he came "not to be served but to serve (or minister) and to give life..." (Mark 10:45). The juxtaposition of serving/ministering and giving one's life is no accident. Fidelity to the gospel ministry of caring for others and for our planet can mean a pouring out of one's life in very practical ways.

That same evening, Simon's house becomes a magnet for "the whole city". Jesus heals their sick and afflicted and, early in the morning, he seeks the solitude of a "desert" place for prayer. The disciples seek him out, as everyone is looking for him. Jesus makes it clear to them that he must move on and bring God's word and healing beyond the city to the neighbouring Galilean towns. The message is for us as well as for those early disciples. Amid all the demands of a sometimes frenetic program, we too must search out the solitude of a "desert" place for prayer and reflection so that we might engage with renewed energy and insight in whatever the new day brings.