

**Reflection on the Gospel-26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B  
(Mark 9:38-48)**

-Veronica M. Lawson RSM

Sometimes we act and speak as though we have the monopoly on access to the power of God. We do not, and in today's gospel Jesus seems to be telling his disciples that God works through people of good will, irrespective of whether they are on the edge ("not one of us") or at the centre of the kin-dom of God movement. Much the same message is found in the first reading (Numbers 11:25-29) which has Joshua, assistant to Moses, trying to exclude two men from prophesying on somewhat tenuous grounds.

Moses does not take Joshua's advice. On the contrary, he prays that the Spirit of God might "rest on" and, by implication, work through all God's people. Both the gospel passage and the reading from Numbers affirm the role of the community leadership and religious tradition in selection for public ministry. Both readings seem to be warning against attempts to control or domesticate the Spirit of God.

The second part of the gospel reading (9:42-48) brings a dramatic change of mood as it takes up the issue of scandalising the "little ones". The reference to "little ones" marks a return to the scene in the latter part of last week's gospel reading where Jesus takes a little child in his arms and instructs his disciples. The horror of harming the little ones is dramatised in a series of sayings that challenge the most vivid imagination.

These sayings are hardly intended to be taken literally. Cutting off offending limbs only deals with the symptoms. It may, however, offer some solace to those little ones who have suffered "scandal" or worse to know that there is no stronger condemnation in the gospels that that reserved for those who bring harm to children and to vulnerable others. We are impelled to do everything in our power to heal the hurts of the past and to create conditions that ensure the protection and safety of our children.

Today is Social Justice Sunday in Australian Catholic Communities. In the choice of title for their Social Justice Statement, the bishops remind us that Australia aspires to be "a place of welcome and inclusion". The cover image of a veiled woman holding her child evokes the plight of displaced women and children in so many parts of our world. It evokes the desperation of women and children in detention on Nauru who now face the prospect of being sent for medical treatment to Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea, a country whose resources are already stretched to the limit. We need to learn again what it means to be a good neighbour in our region and in our world. This document deserves our attention for many reasons, but particularly for the sake of the children who seek our protection.