

**Reflection on the Gospel-23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time C  
(Luke 14:25-33)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

For many centuries the northern Syrian city of Aleppo pulsed with life. That life was fuelled by culture and commerce and pride in a long and colourful history. Five years of civil war has more than decimated the population and virtually reduced the city to rubble. Amidst all the turmoil and danger, medical personnel from the international community risk their lives on a regular basis to cross the Turkish border and travel under cover of darkness to bring some measure of relief to a suffering people. Whether explicitly motivated by the Christian gospel or not, these people embody its spirit of self-giving for the sake of others.

On the long journey from Galilee through Samaritan territory to the city of Jerusalem, Jesus attracts a huge following and teaches relentlessly about the ways of God. By the time he reaches Jerusalem, the crowds have thinned considerably. Is this because it is too hard to persist with their initial impulse to follow the way of the gospel and the one who embodies its values? Implicit in Jesus' teaching about carrying one's cross is a reminder of the intense pain and sacrifice involved in being a disciple. It sometimes means going against what other family members want. It may even involve risking one's life for the sake of others. In the context of the Roman Empire, criminals who were sentenced to die by crucifixion carried to the place of execution the cross beam on which they would hang. The cross image is thus shocking for anyone. It is quite alienating for the faint hearted.

The term "hate" (*misein*) in this context seems harsh. The English translation fails to do justice, however, to the original Greek or the Hebrew that underlies this biblical notion. To "hate" in biblical terms is to "leave aside". Disciples are expected to love one another. There are times, however, when they have to "leave aside" the wishes of those they love most for the sake of a gospel call to justice, compassion, and right relationship. If we are attentive to the gender bias of this ancient text, we might note that married men are addressed while married women are not. Here as elsewhere, women have to read against the grain of the text in order to hear its message. Finally, there is a call in this gospel passage to "leave aside" unnecessary possessions. In a time of planetary vulnerability and of growing division between the privileged and the marginalised of the Earth community, the teaching of the Lukan Jesus has a particular resonance. There is no place in a gospel way of life for self-indulgence, for exploitation of others, or for self-centred appropriation of the goods of the earth.