

**Reflection on the Gospel-13th Sunday on Ordinary Time A
(Matthew 10:37-42)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Until last week I had never heard of Dr Douglas Owsley, forensic scientist, physical anthropologist and former curator of the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. His story, as told by Jeff Benedict in *No Bone Unturned* (2003), is one of utter dedication and commitment to truth. Having opened that book, I simply could not put it down. Doug loved his wife and children enough to ask them to bear with him as he risked his career and his reputation by engaging in a legal battle with the federal government of the USA, a six-year battle that finally paid off. Doug was not alone in his struggle for justice. He had the support of close colleagues and of a legal team who likewise sacrificed everything, including time with family members at significant moments, in order to expose and reverse attempts to contort scientific research for political gain. Doug Owsley's victory was a victory for the American people and for the anthropological record. It was a win for the integrity of independent scientific research. The stakes were high in this case. In the end Doug knew that he had done what was right and that was what mattered.

Today's gospel reading brings to a close the so-called missionary discourse in which Jesus instructs his disciples on what it actually means to be a disciple. While some of the nuances of those instructions are lost in translation, his words to the disciples can still speak to us as contemporary disciples. In following the way of Jesus and living the gospel of truth and justice and compassion, we can be faced with excruciating choices, as was Doug Owsley in his situation. We cannot always satisfy family if we want to be true to what we believe or if we want to expose injustice and dishonesty: there is often a deeper commitment that transcends the bonds of family relationship. We may even be called to relinquish, for the sake of a greater good, a career that we love or income on which we depend. In other words, there is deep suffering in the way of discipleship, suffering that comes from being true to the mission no matter the cost.

Taking up the cross is a powerful metaphor for being willing to endure whatever hardships are involved in realising the vision of God's empire. Words are not enough: we are to live out in our lives the pattern of Jesus' life, a life characterised by hospitality or welcome and attention to the vulnerable. A cup of cold water for "the little ones" becomes the emblem of discipleship and in our post-industrial times the little ones include all God's thirsty creatures, human and other-than-human.