

**Reflection on the Gospel- Third Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A
(Matthew 4:12-23)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Most of the gospel readings this year will be from Matthew's story of Jesus. As with any story, it is probably best to read it from beginning to end over a few days. While the main character in the story is Jesus, there are other characters and character groups. The invitation to us as readers is to enter into the drama of the story, to get inside the characters and character groups, to listen to the words of Jesus and experience his healing touch. We need to be aware that what we bring to the text will inform our reading of the text. What we notice will depend on our own social and cultural context and on our capacity to bring our particular interpretive stance into dialogue with the contexts or worlds that inhabit the text.

In the passage selected for today, the Matthean Jesus makes his appearance as a great light that has arisen in Galilee of the Gentiles. He is light for a people who have lived in darkness and the shadow of death and oppression. In the context of Roman imperial rule, the Matthean Jesus offers hope of an alternative reign. He invites his hearers to expand their horizons, to "repent" for the empire or kin-dom 'of the heavens' has come near or is 'at hand'. He then calls four fishermen to follow him, to join him on his mission of proclaiming the empire or reign "of the heavens". The verb "to follow" can be heard both literally and metaphorically. It is an invitation to live out in their lives the pattern of Jesus' life. They "immediately" leave their boat and their father and follow him. Later in the story we find they still have their boat, an indication that, at some levels, the story is to be read symbolically. At times we need to distance ourselves from family expectations for the sake of the gospel. At times we have to decentre our material possessions even while we affirm their materiality and their significance for the work of the mission.

One might get the impression that the alternative community that Jesus forms around him is all male. This impression is dispelled a few verses later when we learn that "great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan" (4:25). In Matthew 18, there is specific mention of children and, towards the end of the gospel, we find that women have "followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him" (27:55). There is a far more extended group around Jesus than today's reading might suggest. Women, men, and children, we are all invited to turn our lives around and leave behind whatever gets in the way of bringing the empire 'of the heavens' into our world.