

Being Open to an Alternative Wisdom
Reflection on the Gospel – 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B
(Mark 6:1-6)

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Most of us have known the experience of feeling powerless in the face of rejection, especially when it is rejection from those who are closest to us, from those who might normally be expected to understand and affirm us. Mark presents such rejection as the experience of Jesus. Earlier in the gospel (3:20-21), we find that Jesus is misunderstood by his family who consider him to be out of his mind. Members of his family try to take responsibility for him, to take hold of him and to save him from himself. When they come to take him away, he leaves them outside and continues to teach those gathered around him about a new sort of kinship, kinship that is based on doing God's will.

In today's gospel reading (6:1-6), we find that the neighbours and friends of Jesus' family have trouble coping with him. They admit that his teaching demonstrates considerable wisdom. They also acknowledge his extraordinary power as a healer. From their perspective, however, something does not add up. After all, he is basically just one of them, "the craftsman".

Jesus' hometown people do not simply puzzle over his extraordinary powers. They are actually "scandalised" by him. He experiences their response as rejection and tells them how he feels. In so doing, he identifies himself with the rejected prophets of old. The townspeople's lack of faith renders Jesus, the prophet in their midst, powerless: he is simply unable to perform any mighty deeds among them. There is a hint in the text, however, that some few do have faith: "he cured a few sick people." He cures these people "by laying his hands on them". We have seen, in the request of the man with leprosy (1:41) and the action of the crowds (3:10,) some people's well-founded faith in the healing power of touch, of bodily encounter. Touch is once more the agent of healing.

At times, we may be like Jesus, bringing the wisdom and power of God to our families or friends or local communities, only to meet with rejection. Sometimes, we may be like the few who come in faith and experience a healing touch. At other times, we may replicate the behaviour of the opponents of Jesus and discount the achievements of those who excel or whose message challenges us or our lifestyle. To refuse to listen to a prophetic message because the messenger fails to meet our preconceived ideas about prophets may have something to do with a lack of faith. It may actually stymie the power of God. Finally, the emphasis on healing in this reading invites us to pause and consider what is happening in our world, presently beset by needless violence and suffering. It invites us to affirm the intrinsic value of all, human and other-than-human, so often denigrated and devalued by attitudes that dichotomise the material and the spiritual with dire consequences for the Earth community.