

sake, and that I may accustom myself to obey His voice, that God regards, and rewards with greater degrees of grace.

Thomas Wilson 1663–1755, in *Sacra Privata*, Oxford, 1851.<sup>3</sup>

### 3

Whoever wants to remain faithful to his baptismal promises and resist temptations will want to adopt the means for doing so: self-knowledge, practice of an ascesis adapted to the situations that confront him, obedience to God's commandments, exercise of the moral virtues, and fidelity to prayer. 'Indeed it is through chastity that we are gathered together and led back to the unity from which we were fragmented into multiplicity.'<sup>4</sup>

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 2340

### Related topics

*For further study:*

Cross; paschal mystery; mystery of suffering; cost of discipleship; final judgement; reign of God; Jesus the Suffering Servant of Isaiah; martyrdom; Christian witness; eschatology

### Closing Prayer

O God,  
whose word burns like a fire within us,  
grant us a bold and faithful spirit,  
that in your strength we may be unafraid  
to speak your word and follow where you lead.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God for ever and ever.

Collect for the Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in *Love's Redeeming Work : the Anglican Quest for Holiness* / comp. Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson, and Rowan Williams. – Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2001. p.254-5

<sup>4</sup> St Augustine, *Confessions*, 10, 29, 70: PL 32, 796

<sup>5</sup> *Opening Prayers : Scripture-related Collects for Years A, B and C, from The Sacramentary* / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999. – (The ICEL Collects, 1997)

### 4

## Proper 17

*(Sunday between 28 August & 3 September inclusive)* •

### Ordinary Time, Week 22

#### Principal Service readings

Jeremiah 15.15-21

Jeremiah's call is renewed

Psalms 26.1-8

Examine me and test me, Lord

Romans 12.9-21

Love without pretence, serve with a joyful and generous spirit

Matthew 16.21-28

First prophecy of the Passion; the condition of following Christ

#### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

#### Gospel Reading

##### *Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection*

<sup>21</sup> From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. <sup>22</sup> And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.' <sup>23</sup> But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

##### *The Cross and Self-Denial*

<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

<sup>26</sup> For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

<sup>27</sup> 'For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. <sup>28</sup> Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.'

## Comments and Questions

The first prophecy given in Matthew about Jesus' impending suffering and death (v.21) is given at the beginning of some teaching Jesus gives to his disciples about ministry. This will be followed by a second prophecy about his passion (17.22-23). How does this context affect what he has to say about his ministry?

Earlier in chapter 16 Peter has professed his faith in Jesus ('You are the Christ', v.16), and Jesus tells him that this has been revealed to him not by human agency 'but my Father in heaven' (v.17). Now, however, Peter is not so inspired. He is well-meaning, caring that Jesus should not be hurt or killed (v.22), but Jesus tells him that his thoughts of protecting Jesus come not from God but from Satan (v.23). Is Jesus being unfair to Peter? How can we know whether our good intentions are coming from God or not?

Peter has changed from being a follower to getting in the way; from being a 'rock' to being a stumbling block. Can you think of situations where the intention to help becomes an obstacle?

Is it possible for us to think as God thinks, or are we always limited by our human situation? (v.23)

Jesus doesn't give his disciples any reason why he should experience suffering and death. Should he have told them more, or should they be able to take what he says on trust?

Jesus' dialogue with his disciples uncovers different understandings about what it means to be the Messiah (all-conquering hero, or suffering servant). This difference also applies to disciples of the Messiah, which leads Jesus to clarify the implications for followers. By speaking of renunciation and taking up one's cross (v.24), is Jesus trying to: (a) challenge their understanding; (b) put them off; (c) encourage them?

It seems paradoxical to save one's life by losing it. What does Jesus mean by it? (v.25)

Self-denial is not a popular choice in a world dominated by consumer

choice. Is it possible to see it as a positive choice, rather than a negative one?

## Quotations

### 1

Our Lord summons us to follow him in self-denial and the cross. 'Let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.' If we follow, where will he lead? He will lead us through life's sorrows and joys, sharing them with us in love and endurance. He will lead us up to and through the ultimate mortification of death: there also he will be with us and in us, so that our death becomes one with his, a sacrifice well pleasing to the Father, a moment of indescribable blessing, however horrible its outward semblance. He will lead us through death to life immortal, to reign with him in his kingdom. Having shared his cross, we shall share also his crown.

Dom Augustine Morris OSB 1905–97 in *Straight Course to God*. Nashdom Abbey, 1949.<sup>2</sup>

### 2

Self-denial does not consist in fasting and other mortifications only, but in an indifference for the world, its profits, pleasures, honours, and its other idols.

It is a part of special prudence, never to do any thing because one has an inclination to it; but because it is one's duty, or it is reasonable; for he who follows his inclination, because he wills, in one thing, will do it in another.

He that will not command his thoughts and his will, will soon lose the command of his actions.

Always suspect yourself, when your inclinations are strong and importunate.

It is necessary that we deny ourselves in little and indifferent things, when reason and conscience, which is the voice of God, suggests it to us, as ever we hope to get the rule over our own will.

Say not, 'it is a trifle, and not fit to make a sacrifice of to God.' He that will not sacrifice a little affection will hardly offer a greater. It is not the thing, but the reason and manner of doing it, namely, for God's

<sup>1</sup> *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in *Love's Redeeming Work : the Anglican Quest for Holiness* / comp. Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson, and Rowan Williams. – Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2001. p.678