

22nd Sunday (A)

30th August 2026

‘Embrace the Cross, do not flee it’

Jer 20: *The word of the Lord has become for me a reproach*

Ps 62: *for you my soul is thirsting ...*

Rom 12: *present your bodies as a living sacrifice ...*

Mt 16:21–27: *if anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself*

What are we to make of Our Lord’s outburst to St Peter in the middle of this Gospel account — “*Get behind Me, Satan!*”? It’s an extraordinarily stinging put-down, isn’t it? We only need to think back to the previous verses (which we heard and thought about last Sunday) to remember how Our Blessed Lord had commended Peter for his great insight in professing boldly “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” And Our Lord followed that up with the glorious elevation of St Peter to being “the Rock,” the anchor-point, the mainstay of the Church through the ages. We considered at length last Sunday how this also leads on to our beliefs in the central role of ‘Peter’ in our own day, i.e. the Pope whose ‘Holy See’ of Rome is our focal point of communion as the universal and apostolic Catholic Church. All this joy and faith rises out of that profession of faith in Jesus by Peter ... And now? ... And now, just a few moments later He is *rebuking* Peter in the

strongest possible terms: “*Get behind Me, Satan.*” What a contrast! First, “*You are Peter and on this Rock I will build My Church,*” and then, “*Get behind Me, Satan.*” How can we explain this?

Peter was, no doubt, reacting as well anyone might to that first announcement by Jesus of His Passion to come: for Peter to consider Our Lord being betrayed by His own people, and subject to the most horrific tortures and crucifixion, was more than he could contemplate. No wonder, then, that he expresses his intention to dissuade Our Lord from embarking on this path to Jerusalem, the path to suffering. And yet, though well-meant, *this earns him no sympathy whatsoever from Jesus*. Such thinking, He says, is not from God, but is temptation from the evil one. “Get behind Me,” says Jesus: i.e. ‘get in line,’ ‘fall in behind Me,’ ‘follow, like a disciple should.’ Peter has just previously stated the greatest truth on earth, that *Jesus is the Son of God*, but he still has much to learn about what that entails. And the thing that it does *not* entail is some sort of a free ride, or immunity from suffering. Instead,

says Jesus, it means “*take up your cross every day and follow Me.*” Every disciple of Jesus, who truly is a disciple, has to be ready to carry the Cross behind Jesus.

The Cross, as Christians know, is not principally for us an instrument of torture, but it is for Jesus the sign of His love: it is the instrument He used to demonstrate His unconditional love for sinful humanity. It was not something optional, that He could have avoided or passed by if he’d preferred. If we try to imagine Our Lord’s life without that Passion and Cross, it is suddenly emptied of its infinite meaning and salvation for us. Our Lord presses this point home to Peter: the way you think — the way of avoidance of the Cross — is not God’s way, but man’s. We’re not here on earth to feather our nest, or make for ourselves the most comfortable possible living. That is not the Way of the Cross, and it is not the way of Christ or of His disciple. True faith in Jesus demands that we do not spend our life simply avoiding the Cross, but accepting it, even *embracing* it, as Jesus did. Jesus proved that true love and the Cross go together. There is much to put up

with in life; and the only way not to get despondent about life is to see the challenges and frustrations, even the tragedies, in terms of lessons in love. If life sets us back, or we face a human sorrow, we are not to ask, “how can I flee this sorrow, this Cross ...” but we should be asking, “how can I love even more perfectly in the face of this?” How can my life change so that I embrace the Cross, out of love for Jesus, and learn how to love better and more unconditionally, as He did? This is the antidote to suffering; it is not an anaesthetic simply to dull the pain, (think how Jesus even refused the gall on the Cross which was offered Him as an analgesic). We need to invite Our Lord into the pain, for He is the only One who can lead us in and through that pain to a greater life of love.

The further words of Jesus are also very clear: “*Whoever would save his life will lose it ... What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?*” Let’s not ignore these clear teachings of Jesus. Let’s not say, ‘Oh, that’s for Peter and the others, those strong men of the apostolic age.’ No, these words are for

us! — for every disciple, every follower of Jesus: ‘renounce yourself and take up your cross and follow Me.’ We need to examine our lives and see, are we accepting the challenges of life to love ever more perfectly, ever more radically, ever more like Jesus loves? There is no point in life in amassing just comforts and pleasures, or in making life as trouble-free as possible — this is an anodyne life, and ultimately empty. Life is about embracing the Cross, and knowing that Jesus has already carried a far greater Cross, and so can help bear ours if only we will attend His school of love and learn from Him. “*Shoulder My yoke and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart,*” He says. Let’s lean on Jesus. What is your Cross at this particular time? ... Name it. ... *Jesus, help me carry my Cross and learn from You how this Cross leads me to love better and better those around me.*

Finally, I would like to change key slightly, and reflect on those further words of Jesus, “*What shall a man give in return for his soul?*” This connects, for me, with the great demonstration, peaceful and prayerful, coming up

in the heart of Westminster on Saturday, the annual [*March For Life*](#). Thousands of people (it grows larger every year) — mostly younger rather than older, with children too, and babes in arms — will process along Whitehall to Parliament Sq in order to witness to the sanctity of life, that *core human right*. As Jesus divinely states, the protection and promotion of life has its basis in that realisation, “*What shall a man give in return for his soul?*” Nothing can replace life; nothing can be offered as an alternative to life, for a human life, each and every human life, is a most precious thing. We are not to be — we are not *meant* to be — masters of life and death; life is a gift, and there is simply no other starting-pt to life, scientifically speaking, than the moment of conception, a moment of *pro-creation*, co-operation, between God and the parents. No human life, born or unborn, can simply be treated as a thing disposable or of no significance; so we must promote and protect life especially where it is most threatened which is, bizarrely, in the womb where you would expect life to be safest and most protected. Sadly, not so. The pressure to

have an abortion that society, families, husbands & boyfriends, or the medical profession, exerts on some women in their pregnancies can be extreme. We have bizarre double-think at the heart of society when it comes to the life of our youngest ones: we recoil in horror at any ill-treatment of babies and sometimes their horrific deaths — rightly so! — but the same horror is not evident at the 278,000 deaths/year of babies just a little younger who happen still to be in their mothers' wombs. Those 278k lives per year are also sacred, worthy of being given a chance for life lived, innocent as they are, and not taken from them forcibly by the wish of others, whether father, mother, family or doctor.

Note how it is a very different thing for one to offer one's life on the path of the Cross — sometimes even as a sacrifice like Jesus Himself or the martyrs — to having it forcibly destroyed by someone else. The martyr's sacrifice is not the self-destruction of life, but a "loving to the end." Whereas an innocent life taken violently by another is not an act of love, but an act of hatred or of deadly fear. Now,

even when we are tempted to 'go with the flow' and accept the reasoning of the world around us, the *zeitgeist* of the abortion mentality — that it's an acceptable way to treat the little lives of so-called unwanted pregnancies — then we should quickly be pulled up short by the words of Christ, "*Get behind Me, Satan ... you are not setting your mind on the things of God's way, but on the things of man.*" When we are confronted by this situation — and we will be, perhaps in the life of a family member or dear friend — then we need to witness to life. We need to give love and practical support to any woman tempted to have an abortion, especially as we might be the only voice of true reason around her, the only pro-life voice she will hear. We need to help the women, too, who still suffer from the trauma of abortions to find the peace they need that also comes from Christ, and Catholic retreats such as [Rachel's Vineyard](#) express this love of the Church for those who have suffered. May the Gospel this morning to help us embrace life, life with its Crosses and trials, knowing that all along that path the Lord of life is with us.