

13C

The Danish theologian, Soren Kierkegaard, wrote about a wealthy woman who felt God was calling her to the convent. She felt she had to give up everything in order to do this, with one exception: she owned a small garden which meant the world to her. It was a place where she could be alone and at peace. She could give up everything else but not relinquish the key to this secret garden.

There was no secret garden for Jesus except the garden of Gethsemane. It was there where he sweated blood before His sacred Passion. Resolutely taking the road to Jerusalem is another way of saying that, in response to the will of His Father, Jesus had chosen the Way of the Cross. There was no going back.

Being snubbed by the Samaritans didn't help. The Samaritans and the Jews were often at loggerheads and when Jesus was making for Jerusalem, the Jewish capital, the Samaritans weren't at all pleased. In consequence Peter and John suggested they ask God to instantly rain down fire from Heaven and burn them up. But Jesus rebuked the apostles and insisted this was not God's way of resolving conflict. This was not the way of the Cross but the way of the world.

In taking up our cross and following Jesus we also need to be careful about making over-the-top pledges to Our Lord whilst at the same time not having the wherewithal to keep them. One man said: 'I will follow you wherever you go'. Jesus, however, knew the man 'was biting off more than he could chew'. Do we sometimes make exaggerated promises to Our Lord whilst at the same time knowing it would be beyond our reach to carry them out?

The second man who was called by Jesus said: 'Let me go and bury my Father first'. Jesus replied 'leave the dead to bury their dead' - meaning that the man's family was already spiritually

moribund. Here the man couldn't rise above the expectations of his spiritually defunct family. Following Jesus will often require us to stand back and be our own person despite family pressure. But it will also require us to stand up for what is right. Our family should not get in the way of that. From the news yesterday we know that Roe and Wade has gone by the board in America. They say that most pressure to end a pregnancy comes from families - that is, grandparents, parents, partners. That makes these family members complicit. As a result wicket decisions are often made regarding the life of their unborn. It's shirking the cross of Jesus in a big way. St John Paul 11 once said that *"believing in Jesus means accepting what he says even when it runs contrary to what other people are saying" and that includes those of our own 'kith and kin'*. When St Thomas More was awaiting execution for his faith, his family pleaded with him to take a softer option than his conscience would allow, but he chose the way of the Cross. He had 'laid his hand to the plough' and wasn't looking back.

So as Jesus fixed his eyes resolutely on Jerusalem, we fix our eyes firmly on Him. We surrender to him the keys to our secret gardens and allow nothing or no one whether they be family, friend or foe to come between us and our following of Him.