

22A plus

When the 30 year old Margaret Clitherow, the butcher's wife of York, was taken to court in 1586 accused of 'sheltering catholic priests' in her house, she refused to plead guilty or not guilty. She declared that she had committed no crime and she would not plead 'not guilty' because if she did, the prosecution planned to put her children in the witness box to subject them to cross-questioning. As a mother she would not allow her children to feel later that they had caused their mother's death. Now that's self-renunciation at its best.

Last Sunday Peter was on the 'crest of a wave' when Jesus made him head of the church but today Jesus brings him 'down to earth with a bang'. He tries to turn Jesus away from the self-renunciation of the Cross and so is compared to Satan. Nothing would please Satan more than to lure Jesus away from the crowning event of his mission which was His self-sacrifice on Calvary. It would mean the Powers of Darkness had won.

The great journey which we're all are asked to make in life is that which takes us away from self-love towards a more ardent love of God and neighbour. The unique irony about Christianity is that, in order for me to save my life I must first lose it and who wants to do that.

If we shy away from absorbing the full message of today's gospel, self-indulgence might easily take over. There is a lot of it around these days. I saw a disturbing programme on the telly last week about gender mainstreaming in primary schools which can only be harmful. Programmes like that are the ultimate in self-indulgence. In the second reading St Paul warns us not to 'model ourselves on the behaviour of the world around us.

In order to take up our cross every day and follow Jesus we'll need extra reserves of love which the Holy Spirit will give to those who earnestly ask Him.

We hear a lot these days about the self – self-help, self-image, the self-made man or woman, self-fulfilment but precious little about self-renunciation. The most fulfilled people in this world are those who deny themselves for the greater good. Am I one of those people?

We're not talking here about becoming a door-mat for everyone or allowing ourselves to be continually 'take us for a ride'. But 'keeping ourselves to ourselves' does not sound like self-renunciation either. Watching from the side-lines, as it were, and not getting 'our hands dirty' might easily be another form of self-indulgence. We should make every effort to stand up for Christian causes which may break in on our own private little world. Saint Margaret Clitherow could easily have saved her skin if she didn't harbour 'catholic priests' on the run. She was given every enticement to do so, but refused.

This 'dying to self' espoused in today's gospel should be our abiding Christian witness. Without it Christianity would be a charade and the surest way to make it redundant. But we are reassured by Our Lord's own words – 'anyone who loses his life for my sake will keep it for Eternal Life'.