

22A

Recently we celebrated the feast of St Margaret Clitheroe. When the 30 year old Margaret, the butcher's wife of York, was taken to court in 1586 accused of 'sheltering catholic priests' on the run 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 a lesson in self-renunciation – the core of today's gospel.

Last Sunday Peter was on the 'crest of a wave' when Jesus made him head of the church but today he's gone from hero to zero. He tries to turn Jesus away from the self-renunciation of the Cross and so is compared to Satan. If Jesus had turned away from the Cross then Satan would be well pleased because it was through Our Lord's self-sacrifice that he atoned for our sins, achieved our salvation and opened the gates of Heaven for us.

The unique irony about Christianity is that, in order for me to save my life I must first lose it. But who wants to do that?

If we turn a deaf ear to the message of today's gospel, self-indulgence might easily take over. There is a lot of it around these days. St Paul today warns us not to 'model ourselves on the behaviour of the world around us'. I saw a disturbing programme on the telly some time ago about burdening and confusing young children with gender theories in primary schools which Pope Francis says is 'destructive of children'. It sounds like God made a mistake, in making two genders - male and female - and we need to correct His error. That doesn't at

all mean that people don't have problems in this regard which need addressing.

In order to take up our cross every day and follow Jesus, we'll need to earnestly ask the Holy Spirit to pour His love into our weak and wobbly hearts. We can't do it alone.

We're not talking here about becoming a door-mat for everyone or allowing ourselves to be continually 'taken for a ride'. But 'keeping ourselves to ourselves' doesn't sound like self-renunciation in my books. Watching from the side-lines, as it were, and not getting involved as catholic Christians in issues which the church sees as important, is another form of self-absorption. I was supposed to be in London today on the 'March for Life' but couldn't because of the train strike. Have you ever thought on going on things like that?

Another form of self-renunciation is when we put our head above the parapet and stand up for Christian beliefs which a lot dismiss these days. The road to life is narrow. 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 stood firm.

Self-renunciation should be our abiding Christian witness. Without it our Christianity would be a charade and the surest way of making it redundant. But we are reassured by Our Lord's own words – 'anyone who loses his life for His sake will keep it for Life Eternal'.