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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 would not plead 'not guilty' because if she did, the prosecution planned to put her children in the witness box and 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. What a powerful example of self-renunciation we have here.

From today's gospel we see where Peter had a lot to learn in this department. He tries to turn Our Lord away from the Cross and so Jesus likens him to Satan. Nothing would please the adversary of God more, than for Jesus to abandon the Cross and disown His Father in heaven. It would mean the Powers of Darkness had won. But the exact opposite happened.

The unique irony about Christianity is that, in order for me to save my life I must first lose it. Basically that is at odds with my fallen human nature. We won't be asked to do what Margaret Clitheroe did but if we're to follow the way of the cross there will be lots of dyings and risings along the way. But we've been redeemed by the blood of Christ and if we allow the grace of His redemption to have the desired effect in our souls, 'dying to self' will be that much easier.

St Paul cautions us not to 'model ourselves on the behaviour of the world around us which can be quite self-indulgent. I notice recently that West Street was strewn with hundreds of little flyers on which was written: 'let your weekend of indulgence begin here'.

Dying to self doesn't mean becoming a door mat for everyone or being so naive that people routinely 'take us for a ride'. Self-renunciation doesn't mean self-denunciation. You gladly help anyone in need but at the same time you encourage people to take responsibility for their own lives. Self-renunciation doesn't mean that you continually do things for people that they can well do for themselves if they put in the effort. They say that grace builds on nature.

Then you get the people who always 'keep their real feelings to themselves even when the truth is being compromised. The person who has renounced self will be brave enough to make a stand in opposing those ways of thinking and acting which are at odds with the teachings of Christ and his church. Lying low on these occasions has a ring of faintheartedness about it - not in accord with the gospel. Margaret Clitherow would never have been seized if she didn't harbour 'catholic priests' on the run. During her trial she was given every enticement to renounce her catholic faith but she renounced herself instead for the sake of Christ.

This renunciation advocated in the gospel must be our abiding Christian witness. Without it Christianity would be a charade and the surest way to make it redundant. But we take comfort from Our Lord's own words – 'the person who loses his life for my sake will keep it for Life Eternal'.