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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' on the run 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. That's what you call self-renunciation.

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 compares him to Satan. Nothing would please our adversary 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 this is at odds with our fallen human nature. We'll hardly be asked to do what Margaret Clitheroe did but if we shoulder the cross of self-renunciation in our everyday lives eternal life will be ours.

St Paul cautions us not to 'model ourselves on the behaviour of the world around us which by and large sees self-renunciation as fit only for weaklings.

However, dying to self doesn't mean becoming a door mat for everyone or being so naive that people routinely 'take us routinely 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. Yes, we should help people carry their crosses but not necessarily take their crosses away from them because, carried in the right spirit, the cross will be the making of a person. Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus carry his cross but he didn't take it from him.

Then you get the people who shy away from expressing their real feelings in situations where the truth is being compromised. The person who has renounced self will be brave enough to take a stand in opposing what is contrary to the gospel of Christ. Margaret Clitherow would never have been apprehended 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'.