

## **Self-sacrifice v Self-indulgence**

*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. The penalty at the time for refusing to plead was death. There is a powerful example of self renunciation which is the subject of today's gospel.*

Today, it's Peter turn to be taught a lesson on this subject. He tries to turn Jesus away from the Cross and so Jesus compares him to the Evil One. Nothing would please Satan more than to turn Jesus away from the self- sacrifice of Calvary or for Him to curse God from the cross. It would mean he had won. But, if you remember Jesus forgave his enemies from the Cross and surrendered his life and destiny into the hands of His Father.

The great journey which we all are asked to make in life is that which takes us away from self-love towards a greater 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. Basically that is the last thing which we want to do. There is a lot of self-indulgence round these days. St Paul warns us not to 'model ourselves on the behaviour of the world around us. I notice today that West Street is strewn with thousands of these little flyers on which are written: 'let your weekend of indulgence begin here'. That speaks for itself.

We hear a lot nowadays about the self – self-help, the self made man or woman, self-fulfilment but little about self-denial or self-sacrifice. The most fulfilled people in this world are those who think of other people before themselves. Am I one of those people?

We're not talking here about becoming a door mat for everyone or being so naive that people continually 'take us for a ride'. You gladly help someone in need but you encourage people to take responsibility for

their own lives. Love doesn't mean that you continually do someone for someone that they can well do for themselves.

Then you get the people who always 'keep themselves to themselves'. Has that anything to do with self-renunciation? I believe we should be making a scene when we see something done or said which is contrary to the teachings of Christ. Keeping out of trouble might easily be another form of self-absorption. 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.

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 take comfort from Our Lord's own words – 'he or she who loses his **life for my sake will keep it for Eternal Life**'.

## Questions

- 1. At the risk of not being ecumenically friendly are we often reluctant to speak about such martyrs as St. Margaret Clitheroe and many others who gave their lives for the Catholic faith in this country? Discuss*
- 2. Jesus says: 'He who saved his life loses it and he who renounces it keeps it for Eternal Life'. Does this mean we become a 'doormat' for everyone or has it a deeper meaning? Discuss*
- 3. Is the concept of 'political correctness' just another ploy for keeping us in line with the secular way of thinking which often excludes the things of God which we find in the Bible and through Church teaching? Discuss*
- 4. Has the Church 'gone soft' on Penance'? Discuss*