

23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

September 6th – 7th 2025

5pm Ballarat East, 9.00am Gordon, 10.30am Ballan

After my own reading and prayerful reflection on the scripture readings for this weekend's Masses, I was encouraged when I then turned to Brendan Byrne SJ, Melbourne Jesuit and Biblical Scholar who acknowledged *"Not the easiest of readings today!"* If one such as he can say this then it's okay for me as well!

In one of her writings, *In Search of Belief*¹, Joan Chittester OSB writes of the cross she remembers

"hanging on the landing of the monastery chapel stairway. The cross was larger than life size, towering over us, heavy with a twisted, bleeding Christ. It filled the small space in a gruesome, uncomfortable way and made entrance to the bright chapel above it with its high stained-glass windows and gleaming altar a study in opposites. You could touch the contorted legs of the hanging Christ as you went by if you so chose, but I never saw anyone do it. This was a cross to avoid as far as possible. When I look back, I realise now that the history it conjured up was good, but the theology it implied was terrible."

She remembers that years later, when the community built a new monastery, the cross was taken outside and planted in the centre of the grounds. What remained was a hunk of bare, black cross, ugly and empty of a figure. This can tell us a lot about crucifixion, about ourselves and about the God of the creed we profess. Spiritual life can be contemplated so much easier through candles and incense, rather than through pain. But who has not hung contorted on a cross? And who has not then looked at the cross of Christ and been saved by it? And who has not as a result been able to see beyond it to the day when, coming down from the cross, it would be possible for each of us to rise to new life? And who has not found a cross worth climbing and could still pretend to be fully alive?

If there's nothing worth dying for in our lives, are we really living?

¹ Joan Chittester OSB, *In Search of Belief* (Liguori/Triumph, 1999).

It is possible that this is what Jesus meant in requiring that anyone seeking to be a disciple of his, to carry their cross. To become fully alive and truly human by having something that is worth dying for is part of discipleship, to die for the reign of God.

Today's Gospel contains, some of the most demanding and challenging utterances attributed to Jesus in the New Testament. Certainly, the concluding statement, 'None of you can be my disciple unless he or she gives up all possessions', is the most extreme statement on renunciation of wealth in the Gospel of Luke.

In a sense what Jesus is doing in the Gospel is simply being honest with his disciples. He foresees that those who follow him will inevitably become caught up in the suffering and death he now sees to lie ahead of him. It is no kindness to followers to keep them in ignorance of this. He does so, initially, in the strong language about 'hating' one's 'father, mother, wife, children' etc. In this kind of language we must see a Semitic idiom operative. It is not a matter of literally coming to 'hate' one's family members in the way the English expression might suggest. Semitic languages, by and large, don't have a word for 'prefer'. When a person prefers one thing over another, he or she is said to 'love' one (the thing 'preferred' and 'hate' the other. 'Hate', then, is simply an expression of rejecting something (possibly something quite good in itself) in favour of something considered more desirable. While it would be wrong to diminish the strength of Jesus' prophetic utterance, what he is saying, then, is that family allegiances – so strong in the Palestinian culture of Jesus – have to take second place as far as following him is concerned. Those who adopt his mission, his commitments and way of life will inevitably cause some pain and sacrifice to those who hold them dear and who perhaps have other plans for them. Hence the need to count the cost –

The Season of creation that we have just commenced as September began, calls us to an ecological conversion. Last October Pope Francis and other religious and faith leaders met with many scientists and experts, concluding that we are currently "at a moment of opportunity and truth". From a faith point of view, God is calling us today, more than ever, to be faithful stewards of creation, to protect and nourish our planet and its resources, and not to selfishly waste them or ruthlessly and excessively exploit and destroy them. The challenge to be humble before the wonder of God's creation, to accept that we need a more

balanced, and less wasteful lifestyle; we need “to live more simply, so that others might simply live”

Pope Francis has picked up this theme in his encyclical *Laudato Si, on caring for our common home* (LS 224). He says, “Once we lose our humility, and become enthralled with the possibility of limitless mastery over everything, we inevitably end up harming society and the environment”.

As so often in the New Testament, right action flows freely from new vision and conversion of heart for **If there’s nothing worth dying for in our lives are we really living?**

Fr Justin Driscoll Co-Pastor