

## Homily 24th Sunday Ordinary Time 2024

### **'Suffering can teach us lessons in life, we otherwise would not learn.' (The Message of Job, Atkinson, 1991)**

Many of you will know that I am a great admirer of the modern Catholic mystic, Thomas Merton. Merton was a very human Trappist Monk but it was not in the monastery but out in the world that he had a life-changing experience. He came to a crossroad in the town and as he looked at the many people going about their busy daily routines, he felt a surge of great love for all of them. He experienced in that moment a glimpse of Christ's love for each one of us. Later, he would say, 'If we only knew the preciousness, in the sight of God, of every person we meet we would fall on our knees before them.'

In today's Gospel, Peter also has a life-changing experience on the road to Caesarea Philippi. Jesus asks his disciples, 'Who do people say I am?'. 'Some say you are Elijah or one of The Prophets..', they replied. Jesus persisted, 'But who do YOU say I am?' It was Simon Peter who answered, 'You are The Christ, the Son of The Living God.'. Like Merton Peter had, in that moment, a glimpse of Christ's love for humanity.

Jesus, after acknowledging the divine nature of Peter's profession of faith, tells the disciples that The Christ must set his face to Jerusalem where he will suffer and die at the hands of The Jewish religious leaders. This had been prophesied by Isaiah, almost 800 years previously, 'I offered my back to those who struck me, my cheeks to those who tore at my beard; I did not cover my face against insult and spittle.

Jesus, whilst we were still sinners, in a perfect act of divine love would suffer and die to free us from sin and death. It was this sublime love that Merton experienced at the town crossroads and Peter glimpsed on the road to Caesarea Philippi. Each realised that we, every human being, have been redeemed by Christ's Passion and Death on The Cross, thus our preciousness in the eyes of God.

As human beings we cannot avoid suffering, physical pain and sometimes mental anguish in our lives. Yet my experience is that it has often been in times of suffering that I have learned some of life's most important lessons in faith, which otherwise I would not have learned. So ironically taking up our daily crosses can be one of the deepest and most meaningful experiences of Jesus' loving presence in our lives. A hard lesson to swallow but, even St Peter found the salvific nature of the cross hard to accept. We are in good company. but we have to learn like Peter the lesson of Jesus, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me.....