

## Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

There is no human life without suffering and pain. None of us suffers willingly and pain is something for which we seek a remedy as immediately as possible. We do know that some of the things we want to achieve will involve suffering: winning a marathon, climbing a mountain as far as the summit, studying for a school or university examination when we would prefer to be at the beach or enjoying the company of friends. We all know that a visit to the dentist may involve pain and that a major operation also may leave us in pain, but in both cases the pain is endured or suffered for the greater good of freedom from toothache or the removal of a cancerous tumour. There is the heartbreak when sweethearts have a relationship on which they had pinned so many hopes of happiness abruptly ended, and that is very painful. There is pain felt by parents when they see a child emigrating to another continent, or when a child suffers from depression or is bullied at school. And the list could go on. Pain and suffering are part of life.

As Jesus' public ministry advanced he became increasingly aware of the painful way his life might end. He was up-front with his original disciples at an early stage in their friendship: the Son of Man was fated to suffer. Moreover, a realistic awareness that following in his footsteps would bring suffering was something Jesus hoped his disciples would accept. In the gospel this weekend Jesus makes it clear that anyone who wishes to be counted among his disciples must expect suffering: he/she must take up his/her cross daily and follow him. I have often thought that if we were all carrying the same cross, if we were all suffering together in the same way, our endurance would be greater and it would all seem easier. But what makes the cross Jesus invites us to embrace and carry *ours/mine* is that not everyone carries the same burden, what is painful for me causes no distress to someone else. Each of us is an individual, unique in every respect, so our sensitivities, our likes and dislikes, our ambitions and dreams for ourselves are all so different.

What Jesus expects of us is that we carry the cross that life has allotted to us and through precisely doing that we show our solidarity with him and prove our mettle as disciples. Reflection on this demand Jesus makes of his disciples and of this challenge he sets before them always brings me to the fifth of the Stations of the Cross. Simon of Cyrene gave Jesus temporary relief from the suffering of his journey to Calvary by sharing the burden of the cross. Just as Jesus accompanies us on our journey and suffers on our behalf, so we can imitate Simon of Cyrene by helping others carry their cross. We do this out of love quite simply because we hate to see others, especially those we love, endure pain. Indeed, by heaving someone else's cross on our shoulders, rather than add to our own pain we may well discover that our own cross seems less of a burden.

**Father Patrick**