

²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!'

²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.'

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life^[a] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone

give in exchange for their soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

²⁸ 'Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.'

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord our strength and our Redeemer. **Amen.**

In TS Eliot's play Murder in the Cathedral, Archbishop Becket has to choose between the costly way of self-sacrifice and the 'safe' way of self-preservation.

Henry II's four knights approach Canterbury Cathedral to make Becket recant his stand against his king; the alternative is death.

Becket's priests urge him to bolt and bar the cathedral doors as he would against "the lion, the leopard, the wolf and the boar."

For Henry's knights are 'like maddened beasts'.

Becket refuses their urgings, saying, "I give my life to the law of God ... unbar the door ... we have only to conquer now, by suffering.

Now is the triumph of the Cross.

"Open the door! I command it!"

So Eliot's Becket chose to think God's way, not man's.

He took the way of the cross.

In the verses leading up to today's gospel, Peter had declared our Lord to be God's Christ.

So when Jesus immediately begins to teach them that as God's "anointed one" he would "suffer many things ... be rejected ... and be killed",

Peter was utterly confused.

He had no notion of a suffering, self-sacrificing Messiah.

He held the view of most Jews that the Christ would come to conquer Israel's enemies and reign in complete triumph over them.

Jesus, knowing this view prevailed and that as God's Christ he had very different enemies to conquer and very different triumphs to win,

he ordered his disciples to tell no one he was the Messiah.

He had come to defeat the sinfulness and heal the brokenness of our flawed humanity.

His triumphs were to be the victories of truth over falsehood, forgiveness over revenge, self-giving over self-interest.

He knew this was God's way of thinking, God's way of rescuing humankind.

Jesus knew that to think and act in God's way would inevitably incur immense effort, expense, suffering and (for some) death.

God's victories are often won only at terrible cost.

So just as Christ is to go the way of the cross, so must his true followers.

For some it would mean actual death.

For all it would mean denying self-centered aims and desires and embracing his way of un-remitting, self-giving love.

His way must be their way.

And his way has its own blessings and rewards.

Those who live only for themselves lose out grievously.

They become prisoners of their own selfishness - isolated in, dominated by, diminished through, their self-obsession.

Whereas the way of self-giving love opens our lives to the love and friendship of others, to life's deepest joys and satisfactions.

If we keep ourselves to ourselves, that's all we get.

Furthermore, life at its best is not found in grabbing at wealth, power and status.

In such grabbing we lose our true selves. And in the ultimate triumph of our Lord's costly way, what searing shame and ignominy fall upon those who repudiate his way.

Our Lord calls us to share and continue his way of redeeming love.

To overcome evil with good, to refuse to abandon sinful, wayward humanity.

To think and live in the way of God's grace, are very demanding, costly

assignments - often wounding, always challenging,

But it is how God deals with us, transforms us and meets our deepest needs.

Christ wants us to find abundant life by following his way - it will deny us ease, but give us glory.

The cross is found in simple things, like bearing the insults, accusations and ignominy when collecting house to house for charity.

Or in standing up for the priorities, values and aims of Christ's Kingdom. Or giving sacrificially of our money, time, thought and energy to help the needy.

Perhaps to share the hell of suffering known to the alcoholic, the drug-addict, the criminal.

On 9th April 1945, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was hanged at Flossenburg concentration camp in Germany.

Devoted clergyman, brilliant theologian and saintly Christian, he chose to oppose Hitler and thereby sealed his fate.

He was summoned to share in God's suffering at the hands of a godless world.

In July 1944 Bonhoeffer wrote;
"It is not the religious act that make the Christian,
but participation in the sufferings of God in the secular life."

In our own less dramatic way we are called by our Lord to think and act God's way to overcome evil and meet human need.

Questions:

1. Have you been called?
2. If not, have you been listening?
3. Do you need a guide?