

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR A

Second Reading Romans 12: 1–2

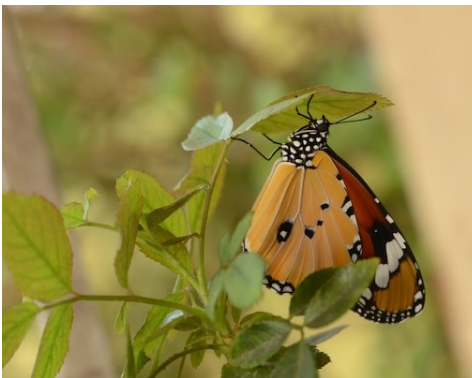
Last week, we were reflecting on God's mercy and love. In this new section of Paul's letter to the Romans, the author looks at the practical consequences this has for Christians.

Chapters 12 and 13 constitute an exhortation for Christians to try to overcome evil with good. This is not so much by following the Law of Moses to the letter, but by being in love and charity with one another.

In suggesting that we offer our living bodies as a holy sacrifice, Paul writes as a man of his time, when 'body' meant the whole self. To 'offer oneself' therefore implies placing oneself at the disposition of another, but it can also mean offering oneself as in a sacrificial setting, just as animals were sacrificed in the Temple.

Here, however, Paul speaks of a 'living sacrifice', which continues throughout our Christian life. In this way Christians will seek to acquire a new mindset. This will probably be counter-cultural, for Christian behaviour and beliefs may well be very different from that of the society we live in.

But Christians are able to change their behaviour and be transformed because the Holy Spirit lives in them. They surrender their whole being to be able to discover the will of God.



Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.



Gospel Matthew 16: 21–27

This passage follows on from last week, where Simon acknowledges Jesus as Messiah, and is given the name Peter. Here, for the first time, Jesus speaks of his passion, death and resurrection.

He was destined to go to Jerusalem

So far, Jesus had been staying in small towns, gathering followers and making himself known through miracles and healings. The following four chapters will relate his journey to Jerusalem, the city where prophets are put to death (Matthew 23: 37).

... suffer grievously at the hands of the elders, chief priests and scribes

These three groups make up the Sanhedrin, an assembly of 23 to 71 men, appointed in every city to act as supreme court. Elders were city or national Jewish leaders. It is interesting to note that Matthew does not mention the Pharisees separately here.

Peter started to remonstrate with Jesus

Jewish culture could not imagine a Messiah who would suffer and be killed. Their long-awaited new leader would be able to bring them glory and fame. Peter here is voicing the feelings of the other disciples and the people.

Get behind me, Satan!

Jesus sees in Peter a continuation of the temptations Satan put in his way in the desert at the beginning of his ministry. (Matthew 4: 10)

You are an obstacle in my path

The Greek word used here: *skandaloi* (from which the word 'scandal' derives) meant any large block or rock which blocked someone's way. It also had moral overtones. Maybe it is used here ironically since Jesus has just called Peter his rock.

If anyone wants to be a follower of mine ...

The sayings which follow are reminiscent of the great Jewish prayer, the Shema (Deuteronomy 6: 5):

'You shall love the Lord with all your heart:

the seat of drives and impulses, hence the need for renouncement or self-denial;

with all your soul:

your life, which you might have to lose through martyrdom;

with all your strength:

your property and wealth, the whole world.

Take up your cross

This is not a specific allusion to Jesus's own crucifixion. Dying on the cross was a common Roman punishment and the cross had come to mean suffering or agony.

He will reward each according to his behaviour

Apparently a reference to Psalm 62: 12 'You repay us all according to our deeds'.