

SUNDAY 30 AUGUST 2026 – 13 AFTER TRINITY

Romans 12.9-end

Matthew 16.21-end

“.....you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

Poor old Peter, he really gets it in the neck from Jesus, doesn't he, in this short Gospel episode. How painful for him, in the space of a few minutes, to move from being the rock on which the church is to be built (v. 18-19), as we heard last week, to being referred to in the passage we have just heard as Satan, or at least as being influenced by Satan. The reason Jesus makes such an enormous change in his description of Peter is, as he says, because Peter is behaving according to human standards, and not divine ones.

From one moment to the next Peter moves from the rock of the future church to a stumbling block for Jesus. He has done so from the best of motives, wanting to protect his beloved friend, but those motives are human. From a divine point of view – from God's point of view – he is putting an obstacle in the way of Jesus, in what must happen to him. We can speculate that the human part of Jesus is tempted to believe Peter's outburst that “this must never happen to you”, but the divine Jesus knows that this cannot be, because he has a pre-ordained role to play which will change the lives of all his disciples, and can change our lives too, for ever.

But how ? What do we have to do to reach this divine standard, which is being demanded of us ? Surely it is difficult or even impossible for humans to reach, almost by definition.

A look at the Book of Genesis helps to clarify this: in chapter 1 God declares his intention of creating human beings “in his image, according to his likeness”. Everything that God created is described as good, but especially humans were expected to behave to exceptional standards in

relating both to God himself and also to their fellow humans and the rest of creation. In the later verses of today's Gospel God's Son Jesus explains that in order to achieve this we are to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow the example set by him. If we choose to live our lives inwardly and selfishly, we will remain unfulfilled; if we choose to open our lives to God and to the world, we will discover untold treasures. The essential ingredient is love.

Jesus demonstrated this love in his life and teaching, as we can read in the Gospels. His disciples, having seen and understood what Jesus was referring to in Matthew 16, for example, began to put it into practice and spread the word far and wide, even as far as Rome, the imperial capital of the occupying power in Palestine. It is the letter of St Paul to the budding Christians in Rome which in his typical no-nonsense style sets out what he regards as the marks of the true Christian, which was our first reading today.

We are to discern what is good and acceptable and perfect, in other words what reflects the love of God on earth, and so our love for God and each other is to be genuine, not subject to ambition or pride. We are to go the extra mile for each other, helping those who need it most, and to be hospitable to strangers.

But we are also to be patient when it is our turn to suffer and to follow the example of Jesus in this, not neglecting our relationship with God but continuing to pray for better times, or, in case of illness, to accept God's will. We also need to pray for the strength not to take revenge for a perceived wrong, but to leave it to God who in his great wisdom knows how to deal with it. Do read Romans 12.9-end again when you get home.

If all this seems incredibly difficult – it is ! – especially in places of work where human ambition and pride are often in the forefront of our minds and get in the way of a more loving and selfless life, which is why prayer and regular fellowship with other Christians are vital, to keep us on track.

In spite of the difficulties and concentrating on the joys, we gathered here last month for a particular purpose: Sophie and Freddie, together with his godparents, brought little Rollo to be baptised and received into the Church of God as a Christian. In doing so we are not promising a bed of roses, but a rich life of love, patience and service to others. This community of St Mary's here in Woodbridge and Great Bealings is trying to live out this life as best it can, through worship week by week to strengthen our purpose. So we pray that Rollo may in time come to understand the Christian life and want always to know more about the infinite generosity of God.

PBW – 28.8.2026