TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

For an adult child, the command to deny ourselves can sound like more of what we learned growing up. Many of us became skilled at silencing our feelings, minimizing our needs, and carrying more than belonged to us. Sunday's gospel requires careful listening. After Peter resists the suffering Jesus describes, Christ tells His disciples, *"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me"* (Matthew 16:21–24).

Taking up our cross does not mean returning to self-erasure, remaining in harmful relationships, or accepting responsibility for everyone else's wellbeing. Jesus is not asking us to disappear. He is inviting us to surrender the survival patterns that keep us from living freely. We may long for peace and healthier relationships while discovering that the changes required can feel unsettling or even disloyal.

The cross of ACDH recovery often involves laying down burdens rather than collecting more of them. It can mean disappointing someone by setting a boundary, allowing another person to have feelings we do not fix, or speaking honestly when silence once kept the peace. It may require receiving care without earning it or releasing the role that made us feel necessary.

These choices can stir guilt and fear. We may feel selfish when we stop overfunctioning or anxious when we no longer manage the emotional atmosphere around us. The old roles promised safety and belonging. Releasing them can feel like losing part of ourselves.

Like Peter, we may want resurrection without surrender. We want a clear identity without grieving the ways we were mislabeled. We want healthy relationships without risking disagreement. Jesus speaks honestly about the cost: *"Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it"* (Matthew 16:25). The false self built around survival must loosen its grip so that our truer life in Christ can emerge.

Saint Paul gives this transformation a practical shape in the second reading. He urges us to *"offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God"* and to *"be transformed by the renewal of your mind"* (Romans 12:1–2). Our bodies may still react to conflict as though danger is near. Our minds may return to old beliefs: I must keep everyone happy. My needs are a burden. If someone is upset, I have done something wrong. Recovery allows God to renew these beliefs through prayer, truth, safe relationships, and repeated practice.

Step Three becomes real when we stop allowing fear, approval, or family roles to direct our lives. We entrust ourselves to God's care and ask what faithfulness requires now. Sometimes it means speaking. Sometimes it means stepping back. Sometimes it means accepting help instead of proving we can manage alone.

Jeremiah's struggle in the first reading also speaks to this work. He becomes weary of telling the truth, yet God's word remains *"like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones"* (Jeremiah 20:9). Once we recognize the difference between love and self-abandonment, returning comfortably to old patterns becomes difficult.

The cross is not evidence that healing has failed. It may be the place where inherited roles, fear, and false guilt begin losing their authority. Christ does not ask us to disappear. He invites us to follow Him as the people He created us to be.

Recovery will cost us familiar ways of staying safe, but remaining trapped in them costs far more. As we release identities built around dysfunction, Christ leads us toward honesty, dignity, and freedom. In His hands, change becomes a path toward our True Self and a faithful way of loving.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which family role or survival pattern feels most difficult to release, even though it now limits your freedom?
- When does setting a healthy boundary or expressing a need cause you to feel selfish, guilty, or disloyal?
- What burden might Christ be asking you to lay down rather than continue carrying as your cross?

MASS READINGS

FIRST READING Jeremiah 20:7-9
RESP. PS. Psalm 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9
SECOND READING Romans 12:1-2
GOSPEL Matthew 16:21-27

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