TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Freedom sounds appealing until it asks us to surrender something we still want. That tension appears in Sunday's gospel. Peter has proclaimed Jesus to be the Christ, but when Jesus explains that His mission will involve suffering, death, and resurrection, Peter objects (Matthew 16:21–27). He wants the glory of the Messiah without the cross. Recovery from lust addiction exposes the same conflict. We want peace, chastity, and authentic intimacy, but part of us may still resist the sacrifices through which those gifts become possible.

Jesus tells His disciples, *"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me"* (Matthew 16:24). Denying ourselves does not mean hating our bodies, suppressing every desire, or treating sexuality as something shameful. Our bodies and sexuality are gifts from God. The work of recovery is to surrender the ways lust has distorted those gifts and trained us to seek comfort, power, or escape apart from love.

The cross of recovery is usually found in concrete choices. It can mean turning away from an image before fantasy takes hold, telling the truth when secrecy feels safer, installing safeguards we once resisted, or calling someone when we would rather isolate. It may require grieving a relationship built on fantasy, accepting limits around technology, changing routines, or surrendering private behaviors we have minimized because no one else could see them.

Like Peter, we may want resurrection without surrender. We want chastity without custody of the eyes, trust without accountability, and intimacy without vulnerability. We may ask God to remove temptation while protecting the very conditions that feed it. Jesus does not shame us for feeling the cost of change, but He tells us clearly: *"Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it"* (Matthew 16:25).

Saint Paul gives this surrender a physical and practical form 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). Recovery involves both body and mind. We offer God our eyes, imagination, habits, attention, and sexual desire. We allow Him to renew the thoughts that once justified objectification, entitlement, fantasy, or self-pity.

Step Three is lived through these repeated offerings. Turning our will and our lives over to God is not limited to a prayer spoken once. It becomes a pattern of surrender when temptation appears. We choose honesty over secrecy, connection over isolation, and obedience over negotiation. Each decision teaches us that discomfort will not destroy us and that desire does not have to become action.

Jeremiah also understands the cost of living truthfully. He grows weary of the ridicule that follows his calling, yet God's word remains *"like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones"* (Jeremiah 20:9). Once we have seen the emptiness of lust clearly, returning to it without inner conflict becomes harder. Even when recovery feels demanding, something within us knows that the old life costs more.

The cross is not evidence that freedom has failed. It is often the place where lust's promises begin to lose their power. Christ does not ask us to surrender desire so that we will become less human. He purifies desire so that we can become more capable of love.

Following Jesus will cost us secrecy, fantasy, and the illusion of control. What we receive is greater: integrity, communion, freedom, and the ability to see others as persons rather than objects. In Christ's hands, the sacrifices of recovery become a path toward chastity, authentic intimacy, and resurrection.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What are you still reluctant to surrender because part of you continues to value what lust appears to offer?
- Where are you asking God for freedom while protecting a habit, fantasy, or condition that feeds temptation?
- What concrete sacrifice could strengthen your capacity for chastity and authentic intimacy?

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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