

Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity | 30 August 2026 | 10:45 Eucharist

We live in a world that constantly tells us we have to create our own happiness, build our own identity, and prove our worth to everyone around us. From the ways we curate our social media profiles - to how we map out our careers - there is a beautiful, deeply human desire in all of us to live a life that matters. We want to shine brightly, to make an impact, and to feel like our existence has real purpose. This drive is a natural expression of our strength, a reflection of the wonderful potential placed inside each and every one of us by our Creator.

However, carrying the entire weight of our own identity can become incredibly heavy. In our modern culture, we are often told that we are entirely responsible for our own success, our own fulfilment, and our own definition of who we are. But when we try to be the sole authors of our own lives, a subtle but exhausting shift happens.

We begin to use only our personal energy, our limited time, and our vital relationships as fuel to keep ourselves going. We treat life like a fire that we have to constantly strengthen by working harder, achieving more, and presenting a flawless image to the world. But when a fire relies solely on its own limited material, it eventually runs out. We end up feeling tired, stressed, and anxious, simply because we were never meant to carry the burden of defining and maintaining our own value all by ourselves.

It is a heavy load to bear when you feel like the entire universe depends on your ability to keep your own light burning. The inevitable result of a life lived as its own fuel is burnout. We become ashes of anxiety and exhaustion.

It is right into this tiredness and cultural exhaustion that the Gospel brings a message of incredible relief, warmth, and hope. Our Gospel reading of Jesus' invitation to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him can initially cause us to hesitate. In a world that values self-expression above all else, we often hear "self-denial" as a heavy, joyless obligation. It is easy to misinterpret these words as a divine demand to give up our joy, extinguish our natural passions, or completely stop being the unique individuals we truly are. We mistakenly picture a demanding God who wants to diminish our personality or strip away our happiness.

To help us untangle this, let us look to the wisdom of the Christian writer and mystic, Evelyn Underhill. She spent her life studying how human beings connect deeply with the reality of God. Underhill famously observed that modern people spend almost all of their lives desperately chase three specific desire: "to want, to have, and to do."

Think about how accurately that describes our culture of self-authorship. We are consumed by what we want to achieve, what status we need to have, and what we must constantly do to prove we matter. Underhill recognized that this relentless striving is exactly what disconnects us from God and exhausts our souls. When we are entirely focused on wanting, having, and doing, we trap ourselves in a very small, fragile version of life.

But Jesus' invitation is actually the ultimate message of freedom and grace. Underhill beautifully explained that the spiritual life is not an extra chore we add to our busy schedules - a spiritual life is

simply one in which all that we do comes from the centre, where we are anchored in God. It is a life soaked through and through by a sense of His reality.

True self-denial, therefore, is a beautiful, liberating gift. It does not mean self-hatred or self-erasure. It is about allowing God to inhabit our fragile and frantic human nature. It is about surrendering to God's transforming love. And when we hand the pen over to God and allow Him to author our lives, a profound shift takes place. We no longer have to rely on our own limited fuel, our own fragile willpower, or our own temporary achievements to keep our light burning.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote deeply about what it means to follow Jesus - he noted that self-denial means knowing "only Christ", and no longer "knowing ourselves". It means looking entirely away from our own performance, our own successes, and our own failures, and looking directly at the person of Jesus.

This completely changes the way we view our daily lives. Think about how an artist works. They do not force the canvas; they allow something brilliant to unfold from a source of inspiration. When you relinquish the pressure to hold everything together, you realize that your primary job in this life isn't to generate light, but to reflect it. But how do we practically make this leap from the exhaustion of our own efforts to the infinite rhythm of God's grace? We do it by moving from our heads into our bodies, and stepping into the physical geography of faith. It happens right here, at the altar.

The altar is a sacred boundary line. The altar is the precise place where the heavy myth of self-authorship goes to die, and where a truer, deeper life rises in its place. It is in the Eucharist that the tangible, edible proof that God does not demand your endless labour but offers you His very self. In the bread broken and the wine poured out, we encounter a Feast of Grace.

As Thomas Aquinas highlighted, the Eucharist is the medicine of immortality and the ultimate food for a weary soul. In Communion, Christ does not just offer advice from a distance He enters our very bodies to feed, sustain, and live inside us. When you take the Host and drink from the Cup, you are consuming the eternal fuel that never burns out. Come forward to the altar this morning, not because you have it all together, but because you are ready to be fed. Come to the Eucharist and taste the true freedom of being completely known, beautifully loved, and entirely sustained by the living God. Amen.

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