

## Gospel Connection

**AUGUST 30, 2020: Sunday 22 / Pentecost 13** [Prop. 17]

**[Jesus] turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does but as human beings do . . .**

**"Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."**

Matthew 16: 21-27

### **On NOT "beating" cancer**

In his book **Leaping: Revelations and Epiphanies**, Brian Doyle writes:

"I know a boy with brain cancer. He's 16 years old. He isn't battling cancer. It's not something to defeat. He is enduring it with the most energy and creativity and patience he can muster. He says the first year he had cancer was awful because of the fear and vomiting and surgery and radiation and chemotherapy and utter exhaustion. But he says that first year was also wonderful, because he learned to savor every moment of his days, and because he met amazing people he would never have met, and because his family and friends rallied around him with ferocious relentless humor, and because he learned that he was a deeper and stronger and more inventive and more patient soul than he had ever imagined.

"He also learned about fear, he says, because he was terrified and remains so, but he learned that he can sometimes channel his fear and turn it into the energy he needs to raise money for cancer research. Since he was diagnosed with cancer he has helped raise nearly \$100,000 . . . "

Brian Doyle, who himself died of a brain tumor three years ago at the age of 60, learned from his young friend that "if we celebrate grace under duress rather than the illusion of total victory we will be less surprised and more prepared when illness and evil lurch into our lives, as they always will; and maybe we will be braver and better people if we know we cannot obliterate such things, but only wield oceans of humor and patience and creativity against them."

**It's a natural and understandable reaction to avoid whatever is unpleasant, uncomfortable, stressful, hurtful. In today's Gospel, Peter simply wants to protect Jesus from the suffering that awaits — but Jesus sharply rebukes Peter for trying to diminish or skirt the cross because it is difficult. To take up one's cross — whether that cross is dealing with cancer or teaching in a parish religious education program — is not a "battle" of good over evil but a means for bringing God's promise of resurrection into our lives and the loves of those we love. In "dying" to ourselves, Jesus says, we become something greater, that in letting go of the temporary and ephemeral we become richer, that in the suffering we endure we become stronger, in the failures we experience we become wiser.**